

FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF
BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

A RISE IN LIFE; OR, THE CAREER OF A FACTORY BOY.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



The manager was about to cut the cords which secured the wrapper when the door of the office was suddenly dashed open and Bob Chambers rushed in. "Stop, for Heaven's sake!" he cried earnestly. "That package contains an infernal machine!"

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1906, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, Publisher, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 19

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 9, 1906.

Price 5 Cents

A RISE IN LIFE;

OR,

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CHAPTER I.

RUBY NORTON.

"No, you shan't see me home, Dexter Pritchard!" exclaimed pretty and spirited Ruby Norton, decidedly.

"Why not?" demanded the well-dressed youth who, cane in hand, confronted the girl on the walk in front of the Bayport Woolen Mills, where she was employed as an operative.

"Because I don't wish you to."

"You put on a lot of frills for a mill hand," replied young Pritchard, in a disagreeable tone. "I should think you'd be glad to be seen walking with me."

"Well, I'm not—so there!" and she made a move to pass him.

"Hold on, I want to talk to you," said Dexter, barring her way.

"But I don't care to talk to you. I want to go home," she replied, a flush mounting to her face.

"Then let me walk along with you," he persisted, giving his natty little cane a twirl.

"No," she answered, flashing a defiant look at him.

Dexter Pritchard wasn't accustomed to being crossed in his desires, and he showed it in the petulant way he received the girl's reply.

He was an only son and a spoiled boy.

His father, Duncan Pritchard, was president and chief stockholder of the Bayport Woolen Mills.

He was the best-dressed boy in that thriving little New England town; had plenty of money to spend on his own pleasures; was accorded a great deal more respect than he deserved, because his father was looked upon as the great man of the neighborhood, and what he didn't think of himself would have been hard to discover.

Ruby Norton was the prettiest, as well as spunkiest, girl in Bayport.

There was nothing deceptive about Ruby.

If she liked a person she showed it.

That's why she and Bob Chambers, a curly-headed and good-looking mill hand of seventeen, were such excellent friends.

If she didn't like a person she took no great trouble to conceal the fact.

She didn't like Dexter Pritchard, even if he was known to have money to burn, and his father practically owned the establishment where she put in six, long days every week for far from princely wages, and that is all there was to it.

Dexter Pritchard, on the contrary, was impressed with Ruby's good looks and piquant ways, and he wanted to monopolize her society when he felt so disposed.

He couldn't see any reason why she shouldn't regard his attentions as a distinguished honor, and it was a disagreeable surprise for him to discover that the girl didn't look at it in that light.

"Don't you know I can have you fired from the mill if I've a mind to, Ruby Norton?" snarled Dexter, growing warm under the collar at her persistent refusal to permit him to enjoy the satisfaction he coveted.

"You wouldn't dare!" cried the girl, indignantly.

"How do you know I wouldn't?" he retorted, thinking to bring her to her knees with this threat.

"Because it would be a contemptible thing for you to try to do," she replied, with flaming cheeks.

"Then don't make me do it," he said, pointedly.

"Make you do it!" she flashed back, scornfully. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Dexter Pritchard! You, the son of the president of the company, to try to force your society upon me, a mill girl, against my wishes! If I told you what I think of your conduct, you wouldn't like it."

"You're a little fool!" snorted the nabob's son, angrily.

"Thank you for the compliment," she said, disdainfully. "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones."

"What do you mean by that?" he asked, suspiciously.

"I mean just what I said," she answered, with an independent toss of her shapely head. "Please allow me to pass."

She stepped around him, with the air of a little queen, and was several yards away before he recovered from his discomfiture.

"Yah! You think you can wipe your feet on me, do you, Ruby Norton?" muttered the boy, with a burst of passion. "Well, I'll see about it. I'll make you pay dearly for all these airs you put on. I'll have you fired from your job, as sure as I stand here. So, you wouldn't let me see you home! But you let that beggar, Chambers, escort you to and from night school regularly. You prefer a common mill hand to me. That shows the little sense you have. There isn't another girl in the mill but would fall all over herself to secure the honor I have just offered you. I'll fix you, Miss Ruby. You'll wish you hadn't insulted Dexter Pritchard."

He shook his cane threateningly at her retreating figure, then turned on his heel and walked away in the opposite direction.

As he left the scene, a small gate in the fence which had been standing open an inch creaked on its rusty hinges and a shock of bright red hair appeared.

Underneath was a grinning, freckled face, in which were set a pair of particularly bright eyes.

The eyes followed the figure of Dexter Pritchard until he disappeared around the corner into Main Street.

"You're a nice chap, you are, I don't think," muttered the watcher, whose name was Andy Ball.

He was employed in the engine-room of the mill, and was a particular friend of Bob Chambers.

Pritchard had uttered his sentiments in a tone loud enough for Andy, who had been behind the gate from the

moment Dexter had intercepted Ruby Norton on her way home, to overhear.

Andy liked Ruby, too, in an unselfish way; but he well knew he wasn't in it with Bob, and he was too loyal a friend to get disgruntled over the matter.

"You mean to fix Ruby, do you?" continued Andy, shutting the gate and walking slowly back to the engine-room pushing an empty wheelbarrow in which he had been carrying ashes to the dump. "You're jealous, 'cause she won't have nothin' to do with you. It would suit your little, mean nature to get her discharged from the mill. It don't make no difference to you, I guess, if her father is down sick in bed, and there ain't nothin' comin' into the house but what she earns. Like to see 'em all starve, wouldn't you, you pesky young dude? What do you want with Ruby, anyway? She isn't in your class. You want the earth, don't you? Well, don't you do nothin' to her, or there'll be somethin' doin' you won't like. Me and Bob won't stand for any harm comin' to her from nobody, betcher life," and the boy shook his shock head in a very positive and defiant way.

"Hello, Andy, what are you muttering about and shaking your head like a mechanical Chinese mandarin for?" said a cheery voice at his elbow.

Andy looked around and found that Bob Chambers had come up unperceived, and was regarding him with a mischievous smile.

"Oh, it's you, is it?"

"I don't know that it is anybody else," chuckled Bob. "What were you kicking about, anyway, old man?"

"It wouldn't make you feel any too happy if I told you."

"Oh, then I'm mixed up in it, eh?"

"No, but Ruby is, and I know what that means to you."

"What about Ruby? Has anything happened to her?" cried Bob, gripping Andy by the arm, while a look of apprehension flew into his face.

"No; nothin' has happened to her so far."

"So far? What do you mean by that?"

"I s'pose I've got to tell you. That dude, Dexter Pritchard, has been annoying her."

"When?" cried Bob, hotly.

"Don't get excited. It's all over."

"I want to know all about it. What's he been up to?"

"When the mill shut down half an hour ago he was outside the fence yonder waitin' for her."

"He was, eh? How do you happen to know that, Andy?"

"'Cause I seen him near that side gate when I poked my head out after wheelin' this load of ashes over to the dump. I wondered what he was doin' there, so I kept my eye on him. In a few minutes along came Ruby, all by herself. He stepped right up and spoke to her. She answered him perlutely and was goin' on again when he planked himself in front of her."

"He did?"

"That's what he did. He wanted to walk home with her."

"He's got a nerve."

"Ruby wouldn't have it, all right, and that made him mad. He tried to make her give in, but you know how

spunky she is. When she doesn't want to do anythin,' you can't make her, no how."

"That's so," grinned Bob, who had had a varied experience with the girl himself, and he rather admired that quality in her.

"When he found he could not have his way with her, he threatened her."

"He did what?" roared Bob, instinctively doubling up his fists.

"He threatened to have her thrown out of the mill."

"You heard him say that?"

"I heard him plain enough."

"He meant that as a bluff, of course."

"No, he didn't mean it as a bluff. He meant it in right down earnest."

"You are sure he did?"

"Yes, I'm sure he did."

"Why are you so sure?"

"'Cause after she left him I heard him speakin' to himself. He shook that dude cane of his at her, and he said he'd get square with her. And he wasn't foolin' for a cent. He's down on her now like a thousand of bricks. He's got pull enough to make all kinds of trouble for her. And he's mean enough to do it, too."

Bob looked troubled.

He knew well enough what that would mean for Ruby.

If she was discharged from the mill upon some trumped-up pretext, the Norton family, which relied on her to keep the wolf from the door, would be brought face to face with actual want.

"Ogden Wells, the manager, is a square man," said Bob. "He wouldn't discharge her without cause."

"I hope he wouldn't," replied Andy; "but he isn't the whole thing."

"Yes, he is; so far as running the business is concerned. No one has any right to interfere with the details of his management, not even Mr. Pritchard. He is the boss of the mill. He takes his orders from the president, it is true, but they relate only to the general conduct of the business. He is responsible for the economical production of the fruit of the loom."

"Fruit of the loom is good," grinned Andy. "That's poetical, isn't it?"

"Maybe it is. I heard our night-school teacher use the expression the other evening, and I thought it fitted the case pretty well."

"Then you think the manager wouldn't be in no hurry to fire Ruby?" said Andy, with a look of relief.

"I am sure he wouldn't."

"Not even if Dexter Pritchard was to ask him?"

"Certainly not."

"Or his father?"

"Duncan Pritchard would hardly suggest such a thing to the manager unless he had some very strong reasons."

"Then Dexter'll try to do her some other way."

"Not if I can help it, he won't," said Bob, resolutely.

"And me, too," chimed in Andy.

"He'll find his work cut out if he tries any games against

Ruby, for she is the pet of the mill. There isn't a man here but would take her part; and the girls, too, for that matter."

"Betcher life," said Andy, taking up his barrow again.

"You're goin' home now, ain't you, Bob?"

"Yes."

"I'll see you to-night, then. So long."

Andy wheeled away and Bob cut across the yard and let himself out by the side gate.

CHAPTER II.

A HINT OF COMING TROUBLE.

"Mother, I smell pork and beans," cried Bob Chambers, as he rushed into the small kitchen of the little cottage where the Chambers family lived on the outskirts of Bayport, grabbed his mother around the waist and gave her a hug and a kiss.

"Why, what a bear you are!" smiled the little woman, looking proudly at her stalwart son.

"Well, I'm hungry as one, at any rate," replied the boy, turning the faucet in the sink and proceeding to give his bright, young face a good sousing.

"Supper is all ready and waiting," said Mrs. Chambers.

"I tell you, those beans smell good. They hit my weak spot. I suppose Hattie is home."

"She's been in an hour."

Hattie Chambers gave music lessons on the piano to a dozen-odd pupils in the town, and in this way added materially to the family income, so that the Chambers lived very comfortably, indeed, in their own modest home, which Mr. Chambers had bought and paid for during his lifetime.

Bob's sister was watering the flowers at the dining-room window when he entered with a shine on his face which showed he had been using the crash towel with considerable vigor.

He sneaked up behind, put his hands over her eyes, pulled her head back and yelled "guess" into her ear.

"You ridiculous boy!" cried the girl. "I'll sprinkle you with water."

He kissed her with a loud smack, grabbed her by the arms and began to waltz her around the room.

"Aren't you just awful!" she cried, struggling to release herself.

"What's the use of having a sister if you don't show her some attention?" he said, letting her go and dropping into his accustomed seat at the table. "Do you know, sis, I like you just a shade better than I do pork and beans."

"I suppose you wish me to take that as a compliment?" she said, laughingly.

"Sure it's a compliment," he said, helping himself to a liberal allowance of his favorite dish.

"You wouldn't say that to Ruby Norton," she replied, as she took her own seat.

"How do you know I wouldn't?" he said, with a rising color.

"Oh, I know," she answered, archly. "Ruby and I are the best of friends and we haven't any secrets from each other."

"I don't wonder. A girl couldn't keep a secret, to save her life."

"The idea! I'll tell Ruby what you said, see if I don't."

"Of course you will. Didn't I just say you couldn't keep a thing to yourself?"

"Mother, will you listen to Bob?"

"You mustn't mind what he says. He likes to tease you," said Mrs. Chambers, who was pouring out the tea.

"This is fine buttered toast, all right," said Bob, with his mouth full.

"Your sister made it," said his mother.

"Did she? Well, you're all to the mustard, Hat. If you want a testimonial any time just call on me."

"You're too good. By the way, don't jump out of your shoes with sudden joy, but Ruby promised to take tea with us to-morrow evening, and then we'll all go to meeting together."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Bob, in a pleased tone.

"I don't want you to run off with my cologne bottle, like you did the last time she was here. Do you understand, sir?"

"Pooh! I shan't want your old cologne. I'm going to buy a bottle of Jockey Club for my own particular use. And let me remind you not to sneak it out of my room when Parker Jewett comes calling on you again."

"Why, the idea! Just as if I would," cried Hattie, blushing like a June rose.

"Well, there's no telling what you girls will do when there's a beau in the wind," grinned Bob.

"Mother, will you make him stop teasing me?"

"I'm not saying a word," said Bob, as sober as a judge, but with a twinkle in his hazel eyes.

"Just you wait till Ruby comes," threatened his sister.

"Well, what then?"

"I'll tell her about the way you've got her picture displayed on your bureau with a true-lover's knot of baby-blue ribbon pinned to the bottom of it, and how I caught you kissing——"

"Hattie Chambers, if you dare give me away like that, I won't do a thing to you," cried Bob, with a red face.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the girl.

"All right, you see. I'm going to tell Parker Jewett——"

"Now, Bob! You're not going to tell him a thing about me. You wouldn't dare."

"Then don't you say anything to Ruby."

"You know she wouldn't say a word, Robert," interposed his mother.

"She had better not," replied Bob, wagging his curly head suggestively.

After supper Andy came around, and the two boys went off together.

It was Saturday evening, and there was no night school to attend.

They were members of the Bayport Social Club, which had a modest room on the second floor of a frame building adjoining the engine-house of Hercules No. 1, on Main Street.

About twenty boys were connected with this organization, all of them employed in various Bayport industries.

During the winter they gave entertainments and dances in the town hall.

They had a football eleven and a baseball nine, both of which were strong enough to make things interesting for similar teams in the adjoining towns.

Bob Chambers was the president and the most popular member.

Parker Jewett, who was sweet on Hattie Chambers, was secretary.

Andy Ball was sergeant-at-arms.

The latest addition to the club, and newest arrival in Bayport, was a young German named Jake Switzer.

He dropped off a train one morning, applied at the mill for work and got it.

He was a good mechanic, thoroughly acquainted with woolen machinery, and the manager soon came to regard him as a valuable addition to the establishment.

When Bob and Andy reached the clubroom they found Jake outside waiting for somebody to open up.

"Goot efenings. I peen waiting about fifteen minudes for vun off you shaps to come by der places, so dot I got in," said Switzer, as Andy produced his key.

"You're an early bird," replied Bob.

"I ped you," grinned Jake. "I got me a leetle shob on handt."

"What kind of a job?"

"You didn't found oud already yet dot I vos a pored sign painder—no?"

"A sign painter!" exclaimed Bob and Andy, in a breath, after the three had entered the clubroom.

"Sure ding. You see dose bieces off cardboard?" said Jake, taking half a dozen from under his arm.

"We couldn't miss them," grinned Bob. "They're big enough."

"Vell, lisdén. I baint some dings on dem for Bimler, der grocer."

He drew a chair up to a table, took a small paint-box from his pocket which bore a German trademark, filled a cup with water, and began operations under the curious and interested gaze of his two clubmates.

That Switzer was an artist in this line was soon apparent.

In the center of the first card he painted a large egg.

"Gee!" ejaculated Andy, "that looks natural enough to pick up. If a hen saw that egg she would want to set on it right away."

"I ped you she vould," replied Jake. "Vunce ubon a dimes I painted a nest mit six eggs in id, und laid id on der grass to dry. An oldt she duck came by, sad on dot picture und hatched oud six shickens."

"That's pretty good for you, Switzer," said Bob, "but if I were you I wouldn't tell it too often."

"Why nod?" beginning to letter the words "Fresh Eggs" in a semi-circle over the egg.

"It might egg-cite some doubt in the minds of your hearers as to its verisimilitude."

Jake stopped work and looked at Bob.

"Oxcoose me, but where did you found dot eggs-pres-sions?"

"In the dictionary."

"S'pose dot you toldt me vot it means."

"It means probability or the appearance of truth."

"Is dot so? Maype dot's a bolite way to call me a liar ain'd it?"

"Oh, no. Only you oughtn't to stretch the truth too far. By the way, why don't you make that read: 'Fresh-laid Eggs'?"

"For vhy? Eferypody knows der eggs vos fresh when dey vos laid."

"Eggs-actly, and that's all that it's safe for Bimler to say about them."

"Vell, I got me noddings to do mit how long does eggs peen laid. I make me dis signs to suid Bimler."

At any rate, the sign was a peach when he had finished it, and the boys praised it highly.

"Dey toldt me dot you haf a new paby at your house, Andy, ain'd it?" said Jake, beginning a new sign about "Smyrna Figs."

"That's right, and he's a cookoo for fair."

"Did you name him after his fader?"

"No," grinned Andy, nudging Bob in the ribs, "we named him after a prolonged scrap, in which the whole family engaged."

"Is dot so-o-o."

"So Bimler keeps Smyrna figs, eh?" said Bob.

"I ped you he does," said Jake, putting the finishing touches on a bunch of the luscious fruit.

"I thought he sold them?"

"Why nod?"

"How can he keep them and sell them at the same time?" chuckled Bob.

"Ho, ho, ho!" gurgled Andy.

"Ho, ho, ho!" repeated Jake, sarcastically. "Dot don'd peen funny for a gobber cent. I toldt you somedings petter as dot. You saw me vorking apoud der engine-room to-day?"

"Yes," admitted Andy. "I saw you, all right. You were doing something to the top of the boiler."

"I found me oud somedings new about dot poilers."

"What did you find out?" asked Andy, with a look of interest.

"I found oud dot it vos hottest vhen id vos coaled."

"Suffering jew's-harps!" cried Andy, falling back in Bob's arms.

Just then a bunch of newcomers appeared in the room, among them Parker Jewett.

Of course they all wanted to see what Switzer was doing, and one and all declared him to be a wonder.

Just before the meeting was called to order, Jewett took Bob aside.

"I'm afraid there's going to be trouble at your factory."

"In what way?" asked Bob, in surprise.

"There's going to be a meeting of the stockholders next week—my father is one, you know—and Duncan Pritchard intends to insist on a general reduction of wages. As there has been a ten per cent. cut already, I'm afraid the hands won't stand for it. What do you think?"

"I think there'll be something doing," replied Bob, with a sober face.

CHAPTER III.

THE STOCKHOLDERS' MEETING.

Apparently, nothing came of Dexter Pritchard's threat to have Ruby Norton discharged from the mill.

If he had made the attempt it was unsuccessful.

Bob Chambers and Andy Ball were a bit anxious for three days, then they came to the conclusion that Ruby was safe enough.

In the meantime, it had come to be known from one end of the big mill to the other that another reduction in the wages of all employes was contemplated.

At least Duncan Pritchard, who controlled so much stock that he was the ruling power in the corporation, was known to have such a plan on foot.

Six months before, the mill hands had submitted, with very bad grace, to a cut of ten per cent. on the company's plea of over-production.

The stockholders were to meet Wednesday afternoon and consider the matter.

The mill hands were thoroughly organized, and the general impression in town was that they would resist any reduction tooth and nail.

On Wednesday at 2 p. m. the stockholders gathered in the large parlor of Mr. Pritchard's sumptuous residence overlooking the bay.

The president called the meeting to order.

Duncan Pritchard was a big, fleshy man, with a fat face ornamented with a pair of light-hued side whiskers, always carefully brushed, while his little eyes were sunk deeply under beetling brows.

He dressed in the finest of broadcloth, with a massive gold chain swung across his vest from pocket to pocket, and his manner was always that of a man on excellent terms with the world.

"Gentlemen," he began, in his consequential way, "I have called you together to consider a matter of vital interest to our corporation—namely, the advisability of making another and more decided cut in the wages of our employes. I find, gentlemen, that the market is suffering from an over-plus of the manufactured article and that we are no longer

able to obtain the prices that we ought to get for our finished product. Therefore, gentlemen, unless we are prepared to submit to a reduction of our customary six per cent. semi-annual dividend, we must cheapen the cost of production. Mr. Wells and myself have gone exhaustively into the subject, and the only effective way we see out of the difficulty is to reduce wages all along the line. You hear, gentlemen, reduce wages say, ahem! fifteen per cent. I shall now be glad to learn your views upon the subject."

The stockholders looked at one another in an undecided way, and it was a full minute before any one of them made a move, then Mr. Jewett got up and said:

"Gentlemen, I am not in favor of this proposed reduction in the wages of our employees. With all due deference to the opinion of our worthy president, I think he has unconsciously exaggerated the situation. While it is true that times are not quite as prosperous with us as they were a year ago, I don't think, judging from the figures submitted to us by our manager, Mr. Wells, that a cut of fifteen per cent. in wages is necessary at this time, nor, I may say, do I think it at all advisable. Our employes have already been compelled to accept a reduction of ten per cent., and even that is a serious matter with men who have large families. I could mention several cases that have come to my notice where children have been taken from school and sent to work in the mill since the cut in question was put through. I hope, gentlemen, that you understand the gravity of this matter. Employes have rights that we ought to respect. Before we make a decided move in this thing we ought to inquire whether this proposed cut may not be a real hardship to our intelligent and faithful workers. A cut in wages is always a serious problem, and I trust you will weigh the question well before committing yourselves to it."

While Mr. Jewett was addressing the meeting, Duncan Pritchard frowned frequently and moved uneasily in his chair.

When Mr. Jewett sat down, another gentleman, a pompous bank director from the next town, arose and spoke for some time in favor of the reduction.

While he was willing to admit that the working man had some rights, he thought capital had more.

He wandered frequently from the subject, and was not called to order by the president.

He was followed by others who spoke for and against the object before the meeting, but it was apparent to Mr. Jewett that the majority sided with the president.

Finally Ogden Wells, the manager, got on his feet, and the little odds and ends of conversation which had been going on about the room were suddenly hushed, and the stockholders prepared to give undivided attention to his words.

"Gentlemen, while I do not wish you to understand that I oppose this proposed reduction of wages, I do not recommend it. I am running the mill at the present time with the smallest number of employes possible to keep up with the orders in hand, and the total amount of the payroll has

been reduced to a considerable extent, while, at the same time, the hands are now watched closer and obliged to work harder. As you will understand, this has caused a good deal of discontent of late. Therefore, I consider it my duty to say that if this cut is decided upon, and I am required to enforce it, it will arouse a very determined opposition on the part of our employes. I am afraid it will bring about serious trouble. It may even lead to a general strike, for I know that our workers are well organized. I hope, gentlemen, you will think this matter over seriously before you vote for the reduction."

The manager's speech proved something of a sensation among the stockholders.

While no one doubted that a reduction of wages in the mill would cause much opposition from the employes, the possibility of a strike on the part of the hands had not occurred to the minds of the prosperous gentlemen whose capital was invested in the Bayport Woolen Mills.

This new phase in the situation stiffened the backs of the minority who were opposed to the cut, and caused one or two of the other side to waver.

The pompous bank director from the adjacent town, however, arose to the occasion.

He was thoroughly in sympathy with Duncan Pritchard.

In fact the plan had been cooked up between the two.

There was nothing in common between him and labor—organized or unorganized.

He looked on the working men and women as mere cattle, and did not hesitate to express himself to that effect.

"Gentlemen," he said, holding up his coat-tails with one hand while he punctuated his speech with the other, "are we running this mill or are the hands running it? That's what I want to know. Do you propose to be dictated to by the working people? I should hope not. We have put our good money in this business, and I think, gentlemen, we have the right to carry on our business as we see fit. It's a pretty how-de-do if we have got to defer to the wishes of those we employ. Somebody has got to suffer for this depression. It remains with us to say who it shall be—the mill hands, to whom, as I understand, we have been very liberal, or ourselves. Our manager openly hints that these people will, ahem! strike if the cut is carried into effect. Well, gentlemen, suppose they do strike? Their places will be filled. There are hundreds, yes, thousands of men and women waiting for positions throughout this State who will be glad to come here at our beck. For my part, gentlemen, I would rather every loom in the mill stood idle for months than that we should be compelled to bow to the demands of the people who would have the effrontery to tell us what we shall and what we shall not do. Mr. President, I call for the question."

He sat down with the air of a man whose words could not be disputed.

Duncan Pritchard immediately put the question of a reduction in the wages to a vote.

It was carried by a majority of two, and the president then adjourned the meeting.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REDUCTION OF WAGES.

Next day printed notices were posted up in different places throughout the big mill notifying the hands that a fifteen per cent. reduction in the wages of all employes would go into effect with the beginning of the first week of the next month.

Notwithstanding that the mill people had heard that a cut of some kind was under consideration by the stockholders of the company, it was not generally believed that it would be adopted, therefore the announcement came as an unpleasant surprise and shock to the hands.

Ogden Wells, the manager, when he passed through the various departments of the mill that afternoon, could not fail to notice that there was a change in the usual demeanor of the hands.

The men looked sullen and determined, the girls silent and uncomfortable.

It was as if a storm was brewing in the air.

Bits of paper were passed around from hand to hand.

In this way, every employe in the building was notified that an indignation meeting would be held that night in Washington Hall, which was the place where the regular monthly gatherings of the Bayport Woolen Mill Protective Association were convened.

At eight o'clock the little hall was uncomfortably crowded.

It looked as if every girl, and every man and boy, employed in the Bayport mill was present.

They gathered in groups and discussed the momentous question of the cut in wages.

Most of the girls looked anxious, a few really distressed, while the men showed in their faces a stern resolve that they meant to resist the reduction to the end.

In one corner, not far from the door, Bob Chambers, Andy Ball and Jake Switzer were standing together.

"Vell," said the German boy, "vot you dinks, anyway, apoud id?"

"I think it's a blamed shame," spoke up Andy.

Bob nodded his head without speaking, thereby indicating that that was his opinion, too.

"Do ve put ub mit id, as dough ve vos so many sheeps, don'd ve?"

"I should say nit," ejaculated Andy, vigorously. "Ain't that right, Bob?"

"That's right. It isn't a square deal. Every person here is going to protest against it."

"Vot goot vill dot done?" asked Jake. "I ped me your life der manager vill bay attention to noddings vot ve haf to spoke upon der subshecks."

"If he doesn't," said Andy, ominously, "there'll be some-thin' doin', betcher socks."

"Someding doing? Vell, I ped you. Dose stockholders, vot dey dook us for, anyvays? Dey dinks dey can stood py our necks on yustven dey feels like id?"

"It will be a very serious thing for most of us if a strike is decided on," said Bob, earnestly. "It means a loss of our wages for an indefinite time. It means that many of the hands and their families will suffer actual want before the matter is settled, if it ever is, in our favor."

"Yah. Dot ain'd no lie, I ped you," acquiesced Jake.

"You don't mean you would throw up the sponge without making a fight for your rights, do you?" asked Andy, looking hard at Bob.

"Certainly not," replied the boy, with a resolute expression on his face. "I'm ready to go out with the rest if the majority say so; but I hope it may not come to that. I hope Mr. Wells will look at the issue in the way we shall present it to him, for there is no doubt that a committee will be selected to wait upon him to protest against the injustice of the cut, and that he will represent the matter in such a way to Mr. Pritchard that the reduction will be rescinded."

"You dink so? Vell, I don'd dook much stock in dot shances. I ped you nine dollars der order stood, und dot ve vill haf to pud ub mit id or valk by der mills oud."

At this point, the president of the protective association appeared on the platform and rapped for order.

The hum of conversation throughout the hall ceased at once, and all eyes were turned in his direction.

He stated the object for which the meeting had been called, which, of course, everybody knew beforehand, and invited the members of the association to express their sentiments on the subject.

The first speaker was one of the foremen, and he didn't hesitate to say just what he thought about the announced cut.

It wasn't at all complimentary to the stockholders of the company in general and the manager in particular.

He said he hoped all hands would resist it to the bitter end.

Then others spoke, and all were for striking at once if the reduction in wages was enforced.

Many of the girls, plucking up courage, had something to say on the subject, too, so that the feeling throughout the room seemed to be unanimous.

The most outspoken of all the men was Jim Flanders, a big, husky fellow, who worked in the packing-room.

His language and attitude were decidedly aggressive and even violent.

He denounced Duncan Pritchard and Manager Wells in round terms, and hinted that means ought to be taken to bring them to their senses.

He was seconded by Luke Sparrow, another packer, who was a crony of his.

Their remarks were frowned upon, however, by the chairman of the meeting, who said nothing was ever gained, while much ground was lost, by injudicious action on the part of aggrieved working men.

He said he hoped, if the worst came to the worst, and a strike went into effect, that no violence would be indulged in by any of the workers.

They were entitled to, and would receive, the sympathy of the townspeople in their efforts to maintain their rights

in a square and orderly way; but if any questionable measures were resorted to they would surely forfeit the good will of the community, and be placed at disadvantage.

He then appointed a committee to wait upon Mr. Wells.

They were instructed to request, in a polite but determined way, that the cut in wages be reconsidered, on the grounds that it was manifestly unfair, and could not but entail a great deal of hardship upon the majority of the workers, most of whom had been for many years in the company's employ, and were, therefore, entitled to a fair deal.

The meeting was then dismissed.

On the following morning, while Ogden Wells was dictating several letters to his stenographer, one of the office clerks announced that three of the men employes wished to see him.

Surprised and annoyed, he asked:

"What do they want?"

"They didn't say, sir," replied the clerk.

"I will see them presently," he answered, and went on with his dictation.

In a quarter of an hour he had finished and sent word to the outer office for the men to walk in.

He easily guessed what the object was of their call.

In fact, he expected something of this kind.

He knew that the announcement of a cut in wages would breed trouble, and he was prepared to meet the issue.

The committee, chosen the previous evening to wait upon him, entered, and lined up in front of his desk.

"Well," he said, in his short, snappy way, "what can I do for you?"

The spokesman of the visitors cleared his throat and said:

"We are a committee from the hands of this mill, whom we have been chosen to represent."

"What is your grievance, for I presume you have one?"

"We have come to see you about this reduction in our wages, the notice of which has been placarded up all over the mill."

"Well?"

"We would ask that our wages be maintained at the present standard, as we are working now at the lowest possible rates on which we can live. It is——"

"The question has been decided by the stockholders," interrupted Manager Wells, impatiently. "I have been instructed to make the reduction as announced."

"But, sir, we think the matter ought to be reconsidered," protested the spokesman of the committee. "We are not being fairly treated."

"I have nothing whatever to do with that, my men," replied the manager, brusquely. "I cannot do otherwise than as directed."

"Do you mean to say that the cut will be enforced?"

"Undoubtedly."

The committee was taken all aback by the firm attitude of the manager.

The spokesman started to say something more, but Mr. Wells cut him short.

"I think you have said all that is necessary," he remarked. "I am very busy this morning, therefore——"

"Good morning, sir," replied the chairman of the committee, with a cloudy brow.

"Good morning," answered the manager, curtly.

Then the three men filed out of the private office with hope crushed out of their hearts, and sought the president of their association to report the failure of their mission.

CHAPTER V.

BOB AND RUBY.

The news that the committee had been turned down in a rather brusque manner by Manager Wells was known to every hand in the mill during the dinner hour.

It raised a subdued feeling of indignation among the girls, and a muttered protest from the men.

Everybody had something to say to his or her neighbor about the matter, and the manager's ears ought to have tingled, the way all hands talked about him.

The committee asserted that he had handled them without gloves, cutting short the spokesman's effort to set the matter squarely before him.

For this reason Manager Wells, who had, heretofore, been looked upon as a fair man, was abused right and left.

Down in the packing-room Jim Flanders addressed his associates in a strongly anarchistic style.

"Strike! Why, of course we'll strike!" he cried, with an oath, "and if I could have my way I'd do wuss than that, d'ye hear?"

"The derned mill ought to be sot a-fire," growled Luke Sparrow, wagging his head in a significant manner.

"That would be carrying things too far," remarked one of the other packers, who didn't believe in extreme methods.

"I s'pose you wouldn't mind workin' at lower wages, eh?" exclaimed Flanders, with a threatening look at the pacifically disposed packer.

"Not on your life, Jim Flanders," replied the man, resolutely; "but I don't go in for doing up other people's property."

"Yah! You make me sick, Frank Dungan. It's mealy-mouthed fellows like you that stand in better men's way. These bloated capitalists will trample all over us and rub it in unless we show them we won't stand for it."

"That's what they will," chimed in Sparrow. "They hain't got no more heart than this box," and he thumped the wood with one of his hairy fists.

"Are we worms or slaves?" roared Flanders. "What I say is this: that the life of a man ain't worth livin' if he's got to feel that a manager can take the bread out of his mouth and leave his wife and young 'uns without bite or sup, just when he pleases. A man's a man, I say, and ought to be treated as such."

"That's all right," said Dungan. "We're entitled to our

rights and we're going to get them, I hope; but there's a right way and a wrong way about trying to get them."

"Bah!" snarled Flanders. "There hain't but one way to get anythin' out'r these money sharks, and that's to frighten 'em. If the mill was to burn down it'd take a heap of money to build it up ag'in, and stock it with new machinery. That'd make them stockholders sick."

"You kin bet it would," said Sparrow, with a grin.

"You forget, the mill and its contents are heavily insured, and if it was to burn down it wouldn't hit the stockholders as hard as you think," said Dungan.

Flanders and his side partner hadn't thought of that, and it took the wind out of their sails for the moment.

Before anything more could be said on the subject, the one-o'clock whistle sounded, and work was resumed.

The principal topic of conversation in town now became the wage issue at the woolen mill.

By far the larger part of the population began to side, either openly or secretly, as their interests dictated, with the hands.

Duncan Pritchard and Ogden Wells suddenly became unpopular, though, of course, no one openly showed this sentiment to the two gentlemen themselves.

Dexter Pritchard, however, was received with a certain degree of coolness, but he wasn't bright enough to notice the difference.

While it was generally believed the mill hands would go out on strike, nothing yet had been definitely arranged by the new committee that had the matter in hand.

On the following Monday evening Bob Chambers called for Ruby Norton at her home, one of the humblest in Bayport, and took her, as usual, to night school.

The school was dismissed at nine o'clock, and, as was their custom, they started off on a roundabout way back, in order to make the walk last as long as possible.

They walked slowly, and the chief topic of their conversation was the probable strike.

"I'm afraid it will go hard with you, Ruby, to be out of work, especially at this time, when your father is ill in bed."

"Yes, Bob," she answered, the big tears coming into her pretty eyes.

"It's too bad; but I'm afraid it can't be helped. The hands are determined not to work for less money than we're getting now, and it only remains for the committee to say what course will be adopted after the first of the month."

"And that is only one week away."

"That's all."

"I think the rich men who own the mill ought to be ashamed of themselves for reducing our wages a second time, and all within a year, too," said Ruby, indignantly.

"They don't look at the matter from the same standpoint we do. I have heard that the market is overstocked just now with the line of goods we turn out. This would naturally affect the price. When the profits begin to shrink, the worker is usually the first to suffer."

"Well, it isn't fair."

"No, it isn't. The owners of this mill can much better afford to stand a temporary loss than the hands, who have no surplus, as a rule, to fall back on."

"It is bad enough to work for a quarter less wages than we had six months ago, but think what it will be when we are out of work altogether. Oh, Bob, what will some of us do?"

"I hate to think, Ruby. It isn't so bad for me, because mother owns the cottage and Hattie makes quite a lot teaching music. In any case, if we do go out at the mill, I don't mean to hang around town with my hands in my pockets."

"Why, what will you do?"

"Tackle something else till the trouble is over."

"But you've never worked anywhere but in the mill, Bob," she cried.

"I know that, Ruby. But you don't suppose that fact would kept me from looking for another job."

"This is such a small town that it won't be easy for you to find an opening."

"Then I'll go to Millbrook or Marshfield; they're not so far away."

"Oh, Bob, I don't want you to go away," cried Ruby, impulsively.

"Don't you, little girl?" he said, with a thrill of pleasure.

"Do you really want me to stay here?"

Ruby blushed furiously when she realized what she had said, and didn't answer at once.

"Mother and sis wouldn't want me to go, either, I know," he continued; "but I suppose I could get around them somehow."

"But you won't go, will you?" asked Ruby, looking very hard at the ground.

"Well, I'm not stuck on going. I've never been away from home in my life, and I guess I'd feel pretty homesick if I were to light out. I know everybody here, while in Millbrook, or Marshfield, I'd feel like a cat in a strange garret."

"I'm sure you would," she said, softly.

"However, one has to dig out sometime, I suppose, and I believe in taking the bull by the horns at the start. But it is rather early yet to talk about leaving Bayport. I think we'll change the subject."

So they talked about other things until they reached the Norton cottage.

They stood at the gate for another twenty minutes, and then Bob started for home.

A smart flurry of rain came on before he was more than half-way home, and Bob took refuge in an old disused shed.

Hardly had he done so before the sound of men's voices fell upon his ear—voices deep and angry, speaking words which riveted his attention; for he heard the name of Ogden Wells uttered threateningly and coupled with violent curses.

Whoever the men might be, Bob had no wish to run against them.

He heard them coming on, talking angrily.

More than once they seemed to stop in the path and stand together, speaking in lower tones.

He could only distinguish a word now and then, and generally that was an oath.

Bob peered out through the heavy shower, which they didn't appear to mind no more than if they were a pair of ducks.

Suddenly they turned out of the path and made for the shed.

As soon as the boy saw that, he drew back into the gloom of the interior, and feeling an old barrel near one corner he crouched down behind it.

CHAPTER VI.

A DIABOLICAL SCHEME.

Almost immediately the two men entered the shed.

Their voices now sounded familiar to Bob, and, coupled with the brief and somewhat indistinct view he caught of them through the darkness and the rain outside, he thought he recognized them as Jim Flanders and Luke Sparrow, the most rabid partisans of the strike movement.

A moment later all doubts as to their identity were swept away when one of them struck a match to light his pipe, and the bright glow of the match illuminated both of their faces.

They were not pleasant faces to look at either, for they were distorted by a sullen anger at that moment.

"You're sure you've been very careful, Jim, about addressin' that box?"

"Don't you fret, Luke; leave such things to me," Flanders answered, with a hoarse chuckle. "Nobody'll ever guess who sent it."

"How did you do it?"

"I found an old envelope addressed to Wells in the yard. I cut out the name and address and pasted it on the box."

"Jim, you've got a great head," said Sparrow, admiringly.

"I'm no fool, at any rate."

"There's no danger the thing will blow up in the mail bag?"

"No. It's safe enough. I've got it so fixed it can't explode until the cover is pulled off. Wells will do that himself, after he removes the wrapper."

"And then?"

"It will be all day with him," replied Flanders, grimly. "Curse him! I'd like to be in the office when it goes off."

"So would I. He can't be laid out any too quick for me."

"Where did you mail it?"

"I didn't mail it, you fool. I met a farmer on the road to Millbrook, and I gave him the box and a dollar, told him to post it and keep the change for his trouble."

"Jim, you're about as smart as they come."

"I'm smart enough not to put my head in a noose."

"When do you s'pose that package'll arrive at the mill?"

"It'll come by the early morning mail."

"I guess we'll hear the explosion, eh?"

"We'll hear it, and no one'll be the wiser where the box came from."

"That's what I'd like to know, for it would go kind of hard with us if we happened to get ketched at such a game."

"We're not goin' to get ketched, Luke Sparrow. Nobody knows nothin' about this infernal machine but you and me. You put it together, and I wrapped it up so it looks like an ordinary package. We've both a hand in it, so neither of us can give the other away without puttin' his own hoof in it," grinned Flanders, but the grin was lost in the dark.

"If this blow-up don't settle the wage question, we'll fix another and send it to Duncan Pritchard," said Sparrow.

"That's what we will. We'll scare the duff out of them stockholders, one way or another."

The men continued to smoke away, peer out into the rain, and vent their spite in coarse language against Ogden Wells, Duncan Pritchard, and the whole bunch of the stockholders of the Bayport Woolen Mills.

Bob, from his post of concealment behind the barrel, had heard every word they said after entering the shed.

Gradually he began to understand the meaning of their conversation.

Their murderous object became clear to him, and it made his blood run cold.

They had manufactured some kind of an infernal machine, which Flanders had sent by mail to the manager of the mill.

It was due to reach Mr. Wells in the morning.

The manager was accustomed to receive all kinds of small packages, and, of course, he would open it at his desk when he went through his mail.

Apparently it was constructed so as to explode when the cover was pulled off.

Bob had read about similar machines, some of which had brought about appalling results to the victim, while others had been detected in time to render them harmless.

It was a brutal and cowardly means of working vengeance upon a marked man.

"It's right in line with the natures of such fellows as Flanders and Sparrow to get up such a villainous scheme," breathed Bob, with a thrill of indignation. "It is lucky the rain drove those chaps in here. I'll put a spoke in their wheel and save Mr. Wells from falling a victim to their design."

At that moment Bob's foot slipped and made a slight noise on the floor of the shed.

"Hist!" said Flanders. "I heard something move."

"So did I," answered Sparrow, in an uneasy tone.

They listened intently, while Bob, whose heart jumped into his throat at the thought that his presence there might be discovered, kept very quiet.

A silence like that in a grave vault followed.

"I guess it was a rat," said Flanders, at length.

"Or, mebbe, the rain," muttered Sparrow, drawing a breath of relief.

"Well, I'm goin' to make sure we're alone," went on Flanders.

He struck a match and looked carefully around the interior of the shed.

Bob was well out of sight, so neither of the rascals detected him.

Flanders, however, saw the empty barrel, and his suspicious nature induced him to walk over and look into it.

While he was in the act the dying match burned his fingers, and he dropped it.

He struck another match and peered into the barrel.

"There ain't nothin'——" he began, but just then the flare of the match, as he raised his hand, lit up the top of Bob's hat.

With a terrible curse, Flanders reached down behind the barrel and grasped at the object his sharp eyes saw there.

Bob realized a crisis had come, and he tried to elude the scoundrel's clutch.

He was not successful, and a moment later Flanders drew him out from his place of concealment.

"Strike a match, Sparrow," roared Bob's captor. "I want to see who I've got here. It's a boy, at any rate."

A match flared up, and the two men looked at their captive.

"Bob Chambers!" both exclaimed, in a breath.

It was an unpleasant surprise to them that a mill hand had, in all probability, overheard their conversation.

Not only that, but Bob bore the reputation of being an honest, upright lad, who had no bad habits, attended meeting regularly on Sunday, and was well liked by every one, the few turbulent characters alone excepted, from the manager down.

He was the last person in town Flanders and Sparrow would have wanted to get an inkling of their dastardly plot.

"What are you doing in here at this time of the night?" demanded the chief ruffian, holding the boy firmly by the collar of his jacket.

"I came in to get out of the rain."

"You were here when we came, then?"

"Yes."

"Why were you hidin' behind that barrel?"

Bob made no reply to this question.

"Are you goin' to answer me?"

"I don't know that it's any of your business," said Bob, defiantly.

"It is our business," snarled Flanders, giving him a rough shake.

"What difference can it make to you if I was resting myself until the weather cleared up?"

It was an ingenious excuse, but it didn't satisfy the suspicions of the men.

"It makes a heap of difference," gritted Flanders.

"If you don't want me here I'll go," replied Bob. "It's stopped raining."

"I dare say you'd like to go, but you're not goin' any

the more for that," said the burly villain, with a somewhat brutal laugh. "Anyway, not yet. We didn't expect the pleasure of your company, you know," with some sarcasm, "but now you're here you've got to stop till we say you kin go."

The boy's answer to this was a sudden jerk, squirming out of Flander's grasp, and rush to the door of the shed.

Sparrow, however, reached for and caught him in the dark, so the effort to free himself was a failure on Bob's part.

"You're mighty spry, my lad, but not quite spry enough," chuckled Flanders, once more securing a grip on the boy.

"What do you want with me, anyway?" demanded Bob, a bit uneasily, though he had a pretty clear idea what was in the wind.

"We want to know if you've been listenin' to what we was talkin' about since we came in here."

Bob might easily have denied that he had overheard a word, and no doubt most boys would have done so under the circumstances, but our hero scorned to tell a direct lie, and the only thing he could do was to take refuge in silence.

"Did you hear what we said after we came in here?" repeated Flanders, in a threatening tone.

"I heard a great deal," admitted the boy, desperately.

"About that box, eh?" hissed the rascal.

"Yes."

"You hear that, Sparrow?"

"I hear," snarled his companion, in shaky tones.

"Look here," snarled Flanders, in a voice of suppressed fury, "why didn't you go when you found we were talkin' about matters that didn't concern you?"

Not knowing what reply to make to this, Bob said nothing.

"Why didn't you go?"

"I didn't care to have you know I was here," answered Bob, doggedly.

"You didn't, eh? If we hadn't ketched you a-listenin' behind that barrel you'd waited till we went off and then you'd gone and blowed the whole thing. Ain't that what you meant to do?"

Bob didn't answer.

"You cantankerous imp!" cried Flanders, passionately. "If you don't open your jaw I'll choke the truth out of you," and the fellow gripped Bob by the throat. "Tell me now what you meant to do if we had not caught you before we left the shed?"

"I meant to try and stop you from carrying out your plan to kill Mr. Wells with that infernal machine you have mailed to him," said the boy, boldly.

"You meant to do that, eh?" asked the villain, and his voice was harder and his manner harsher than before.

"Yes, I did. I meant to try and save you from the commission of a crime," said Bob, speaking confidently and bravely.

"Ho!" answered Flanders, with a sneer. "That's very good of you, you cantin' little hypocrite! Havin' accidentally overheard us, you wanted to turn the information

to our moral good. I s'pose you didn't figger it would send us to jail, did you?"

Bob was silent.

"S'posin' we let you go, what'll you do?"

"What will I do?"

"Yes."

"I shall try to save Mr. Wells."

"You will?"

"I will."

"You'll tell all you know and have us two juggled."

"No. I'm willing to give you a chance," said Bob, eagerly.

"How?"

"I'll warn him against the package, but I won't say anything about you or Luke Sparrow."

"You're very kind," replied Flanders, in jeering tones.

"And you think we are green enough to trust you, eh? At any rate, you mean to balk our scheme if you get the chance. What shall we do to him, Sparrow?"

"I dunno," replied the other rascal, in some trepidation.

"Well, I know. He's got to be silenced, do you understand?"

"How are you goin' to do it?"

"How?" and Flanders uttered an unpleasant laugh. "I'm not goin' to State prison to save a little psalm-singin' monkey like this chap from a squeeze on the throat or a knock on the head."

"You don't mean to murder him?" gasped Sparrow, in a tone of protest.

"What would you do? Let him go so he could blab on us?" sneered the other.

"No. We can't let him go. We could take him somewhere and keep him out of sight."

"Where would you say to take him?" snarled his companion.

Sparrow scratched his head in a perplexed way and was silent.

"You're mighty ready with your suggestions, Luke Sparrow, but what do they amount to? S'posin' we did hide him away somewheres, we'd have to feed him to keep him alive, wouldn't we? If we forgot to do it, or somethin' prevented us doin' it, he'd die, wouldn't he? It will save a lot of trouble and thinkin' if he's made to slip his wind first instead of last."

"I don't like the idea of——" began Sparrow, slowly.

"Well, you've got to like it. You're in this thing with me, sink or swim, and you're goin' to do your share, or by Christopher! I'll make you wish you'd never been born!" cried Flanders, furiously.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Sparrow, evidently cowed.

"I want you to help me carry this chap to the cut."

"To the cut? What for?" asked Luke, in surprise.

"You'll see when you get there. Just wait a moment till I fasten somethin' 'round his jaw," and he proceeded to gag Bob with a dirty red handkerchief. "That'll do. Now grab his legs and follow me."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE RAILROAD CUT.

The cut to which Jim Flanders referred was the railroad cut about half a mile from the shed, just outside the town limits.

Four tracks of the Eastern Railroad spanned the narrow break in a long, low hill, running northward to Millbrook and southward to Marshfield, the nearest stopping places either side of Bayport.

The cut was a lonesome spot at all hours, but particularly so at night.

Just why Flanders proposed to carry Bob Chambers to that locality was not exactly clear to the somewhat dull comprehension of Luke Sparrow; but he was afraid to inquire into the matter in his companion's present frame of mind.

So the two men trudged along in silence, bearing their burden between them.

The rain had ceased some time back, the clouds were breaking away, and the rest of the night promised to be clear.

There were a couple of switches near the entrance to the cut and a switchman's shanty.

As they approached the place they saw a dull gleam of light shining from the solitary window of the hut, which showed that the night switchman was on duty, as he should be.

The red light of one switch and the white light of the other faced them as they tramped slowly along.

Finally Flanders, who was leading the way, came to a halt a short distance from the entrance to the cut, and motioned to his companion to drop the boy.

They laid Bob down on the damp ground, and Flanders put his foot upon his chest to keep him there.

"There'll be a freight train along here soon," said the chief rascal, in a low tone.

"What of it?" asked his companion in guilt.

Flanders gave utterance to a hoarse chuckle, which seemed to come from his boots, and then said:

"It'll save us the trouble of knockin' this chap on the skull, or chokin' the breath out of him."

"How will it?"

"Look here, Sparrow, you seem to be thicker than the mud out in the harbor. We've got to get rid of this boy, hain't we? Well, what's an easier way than to lay him on the track down the cut yonder, just before the freight comes along? The engine and long train'll chaw him into little bits. That'll rid us of him for good and all. No fear, then, of any information about that box gettin' out of him."

Bob, where he lay on the ground, heard every word of this horrible suggestion, and its import sent a cold chill to his heart.

"Ain't there no other way?" asked Sparrow, who didn't seem to have any heart in the cold-blooded disposal of the boy, although he did not feel the least remorse about send-

ing Manager Wells, of the mill, to his death in an equally terrible way.

"No, there ain't," snarled Flanders, impatiently. "He's got to die, and that's all there is to it. It's his own fault for buttin' in where he wasn't wanted."

"I ain't got nothin' ag'in the boy, except he knows too much," said Sparrow.

"Ain't that enough?"

"It'll be a hangin' matter if it's traced to us."

"How'll it be traced to us? No one has seen us fetchin' him along so far, and there's no one 'round here to see us carry him up the track, except the switchman, and he's toastin' his toes by the stove in his shanty."

"Well, I hate to do it," answered Luke, reluctantly.

"Do you know what it would mean if we let him go so he could give the snap ag'in Wells away? It would mean a twenty-year spell for you and me at the State prison. How does that strike you, eh?" said Flanders, grimly.

"Twenty years is a long time," answered Luke, waveringly.

"You kin bet it is. I knowed a man once who'd been through that mill, and he said it's wuss than bein' hanged."

"But the boy promised not to give us away."

"You believe that, do you?" sneered Flanders.

"He'll agree to that to save his life. I know I would if I was in his shoes."

"I don't mean to take no such chance. I wouldn't trust no boy livin'. He's got to turn up his toes, I tell you, and there ain't the least use of you arguin' ag'in, Luke Sparrow. There's the whistle of the freight now. It goes up on this here track. We've got to sneak into the cut before the switchman pokes his nose outside, which he'll do in about three shakes of a lamb's tail. That whistle may be a signal to him for all we know otherwise."

Flanders reached down and grabbed Bob by the shoulders, while Sparrow got hold of him once more by the legs, and in that shape they filed into the cut, and were immediately lost in the gloom of the pass.

As they walked forward, the heavy panting of the freight engine in their rear reached their ears, as, at reduced speed, it came rumbling along through the suburbs of Bayport, where the yard rule had to be observed by the engineers.

About half-way through the cut there was a break in the hillside, where some rude wooden stairs had been set up for the accommodation of railroad men who lived on the hill beyond.

There was a sign at the top of the steps marked "Danger," which warned the casual pedestrian against using the stairs.

This was the spot selected by Flanders, who was well acquainted with the locality, for carrying out his fearful purpose.

"Drop him!" he cried to Sparrow.

Luke let go of Bob's legs, but Flanders held the boy upright.

"I s'pose you understand what you're up ag'in, you

tarnation young monkey?" said the rascal, addressing the boy he gripped tightly by the arms to prevent him from getting away. "You've got just about two minits to live, and then you'll be under the wheels of that there freight you kin hear comin' this way. As I ain't spiteful enough to make your suffer any more'n necessary to put a stop to that tongue of yours, I'm goin' to fix you so you won't never know you've been chawed up by that train."

Bob had been thinking very hard from the moment he realized the fate in store for him.

He was now in a state of utter desperation, and though he appeared to be passive he was mustering his strength for one final attempt to save himself.

He felt the crucial moment had now arrived.

Putting every ounce of his energy into the effort, he tore himself free, struck Flanders a staggering blow in the face, and turned to flee.

The attempt would probably have been successful, for Flanders had been wholly taken by surprise, and the blow, no light one, had momentarily dazed him, while Luke Sparrow was not in a position to hinder the boy's escape, but for the unfortunate fact that Bob's ankle turned under him and he fell between the tracks.

He staggered to his feet and fell again.

Before he could rise a second time, Flanders jumped on him like a tiger.

A desperate struggle ensued, in the midst of which came the prolonged whistle of the freight as it approached the entrance to the cut.

Chug—chug! Chug—chug! came the panting engine, as if complaining about the heavy, rumbling load it was pulling along over the rails.

"Blast you!" cried Flanders, as the glare of the headlight began to glisten along the rails.

He struck fiercely at Bob, and the blow, though only a glancing one on the head, dazed the boy, and he fell back nerveless at the man's mercy.

Believing he had thoroughly stunned Bob, which was his original intention, Flanders threw him half across the rail, in such a position that the train would cut the lad in two.

Then he sprang away, seized the conscience-stricken Sparrow by the arm, and dragged him toward the wooden stairs.

"Quick! Up with you!" he cried, fiercely, "or we shall be seen."

Luke allowed himself to be hustled up the steps, and the two villains reached the top of the hill as the freight, with gradually increasing speed, came rolling along through the cut.

They paused a dozen yards away.

Although they could no longer see the train, they could tell by the sound that it was passing the spot where Bob Chambers lay stretched across the track.

"That settles his goose!" breathed Flanders. "Nothing now stands between us and Ogden Wells."

But Luke Sparrow didn't hear a word his companion said.

He was staring through the darkness toward the cut, his eyes distended with horror and his limbs shaking with a palsy of fear.

Already he felt the brand of Cain upon his brow.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLOSE CALL.

At that moment there came to the ears of the two scoundrels the sound of approaching voices from in front.

Two boys, who for some reason or other were out late, for it was now close on to midnight, were coming toward the cut.

One of them at least appeared to be unusually happy, for he was singing after a hilarious fashion a popular air:

"I'm der kid dot's all der candy,
I'm a Yankee Dootle Danty,
I'm gled I am,
So's Uncle Sam.
I'm a real life Yankee Dootle,
Made mine name, und fame und bootle,
Yust like Misder Dootle dit,
Riding by der pony on——"

"Oh, come off, Jake!" interrupted the voice of Andy Ball, "you can't sing worth a sour potato."

"Py shimmany Ghristmas! Der madder mit you is dot some ears for moosic you don'd got, I ped you."

"Do you call that yawp you were gettin' off singin'?"

"Yah. Why nod?"

"If it isn't the worst ever I'm a liar," cried Andy, in a disgusted tone.

"Den oxcoose me off I say you peen a liar twice dimes over."

"Don't call me a liar, you bunch of misery, or there'll be somethin' doin'."

"Is dot so-o-o? Vell, I ped you off I hid you vunce und you don'd fall down I'll look und see vot you vos tied to."

"Well, if I hit you once somebody will have to take you to the hospital."

"I dink you vos dalking py your hat drough."

"You do, eh?"

"Yah."

"I've a great mind to give you a biff on the solar plexus."

"I wouldn't did dot off I vos you. You vill seen your mistake pretty soon already yet."

They were now abreast of Flanders and Sparrow, who shrank away into the gloom.

"You make me sick!" growled Andy.

"Is dot so-o-o? Off I vos you den I would seen der doctor so soon as now."

"If you don't look where you're goin' you'll need a doctor to sew you together. What are you tryin' to do—fall into the cut?"

Switzer had very nearly made a misstep which would have sent him head foremost down onto the rails below.

Andy reached out and yanked him back just in time.

"Py shimmany Ghristmas! Dot vos a glose call I ped you."

"Well, don't do it again. There's the stairs in front of you."

"Vell," said Jake, sagely, "some beoble don'd know so much pefore some dings habbens as dey knew afterwards, ain't id?"

They went down the steps and started across the tracks, when Jake tripped over something yielding in his path.

"Py shinsher!" he exclaimed, as he picked himself up. "I pelief I haf cracked mine yaw."

"Serves you right!" grumbled Andy, who was in a hurry to get home. "Why don't you look where you're goin', and not tangle your feet up with the track."

"I ped you dot don'd peen no tracks dot dook from under me mine feets."

"Oh, rats! Come on!" retorted Andy, impatiently.

"Yust waits a liddle. I haf some curiosity to seen vot dot dings vos."

Jake stooped down and took a close look at the obstruction.

"Py Shorge! Id's somepody py der tracks upon. Off he stays py dis blaces he vill pe pretty soon alretty yet kilt, I ped you. Here, Andy, hellup me took him py der danger oud."

"Who is he? Some drunken tramp?" asked Andy, returning to lend his assistance.

"Nein. He vos a poy."

"What's the matter with him? Got a fit?"

"Vell, dere vos somedings der madder mid him."

While Jake lifted the unfortunate to a sitting posture, Andy struck a match.

"Bob Chambers!" cried Andy, dropping the match in his astonishment.

"Shimmany Ghristmas! Vot peen he doing oud here?" gasped Jake.

"I say, Bob," said Andy, anxiously, shaking his friend by the arm, "what does this mean?"

Bob was fast coming to himself, and in another moment he looked at the indistinct forms of his two friends.

"Is that you, Andy?" he asked.

"Sure! And here's Jake. If he hadn't tumbled over you we never would have known you were here. What's the trouble, old chap?"

Bob got on his feet, looked around and shuddered.

"I've just had a narrow squeal for my life," he said.

"How is that?" inquired Andy, curiously.

"Yah," chipped in Switzer, "how dot come apoud?"

"I was brought out here to be made into mincemeat by that freight train which just passed."

"What!" gasped Andy, while a similar ejaculation gurgled down in Jake's throat.

"That's right," asserted Bob, with a shiver. "If it hadn't been that the villains placed me on the wrong track I should have been a mangled corpse by this time."

"Who done dot wickedness?" asked Jake.

"You will hardly believe me when I tell you."

"Well, let us hear, if you know," said Andy.

"Two of the mill hands—Jim Flanders and Luke Sparrow."

"You don't mean it!" gasped Andy, astonished.

"Shim Flanders und Luke Sbarrow! Vell, I always dought dey peen pretty pad eggs. For vhy did dey done dis ding to you?"

"Because they caught me listening to a plot they had hatched against Ogden Wells."

"So. Vot were dey going to done to him?"

"Blow him to pieces with an infernal machine they have sent him through the mail."

"Oh, come off, Bob! You're drawin' it pretty strong, ain't you?" said Andy, incredulously.

"You wouldn't think so if you had heard those two chaps going over the thing as I did. They were in earnest, all right. If it wasn't the real goods they wouldn't have tried to murder me for getting on to them."

"Tell us all about it, Bob," said Andy, as the three boys walked out of the cut and started up the first street at hand.

Bob at once told them the complete story of his night's adventures.

"Well, you did have a close call for a fact," commented Andy.

"I ped you," chimed in Jake.

"Altogether too close to be pleasant," replied Bob.

"What are you goin' to do about it? You'll have Flanders and Sparrow pulled in right away, of course?"

"I rather guess I will. I shan't do anything till morning. That'll be time enough. It will be an unexpected surprise for them, as they think I am done for, no doubt."

"How about that box in the mail?"

"I'll see Mr. Wells first thing in the morning and warn him about it."

"Those fellows will go up for a good spell for their villainy."

"There isn't any doubt about it. They can easily be convicted on either charge. They'll get from fifteen to twenty years, I should think."

"Serve 'em right. They've been makin' a lot of trouble for the society, one way or another. Frank Dungan, one of the packers, said they were talkin' of settin' the mill afire to bring the stockholders to reason. What do you think of that?"

"I think it'll be a good thing to get them out of the way."

The boys parted at the next corner, each going his own way.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INFERNAL MACHINE.

As Bob sometimes stayed out late at the club, nothing was thought of his getting home after midnight on this particular occasion.

He got up at his usual hour next morning, ate his break-

fast and started for the mill, where he had to report promptly at seven o'clock.

On his way he stopped at the residence of Ogden Wells, but found that the manager had left town the previous afternoon and was not expected back till eleven o'clock that morning.

"I haven't time to go to the police now on my own hook," he mused, as he walked rapidly along toward the mill. "I'll have to let the matter rest till I see Mr. Wells. He'll be at the office at eleven. I'll be on the lookout for him."

Bob kept a wary eye out for Flanders and Sparrow, as he didn't want them to see him, but it happened neither of the rascals showed up for work that morning.

The fact of the matter was, both had got intoxicated after their return from the railroad cut to the former's lodgings, and were now sleeping off the effects.

The early mail arrived at the mill about half-past eight.

At nine o'clock Bob managed to get out of the operating room, where he was employed, and went downstairs to the general office.

He went up to the office-boy, whose duty it was to bring the mail from the postoffice, and asked him if there was a box, or package which might contain a box, in Mr. Wells's mail.

The boy was surprised at the question, but told him there was nothing of the kind among the pile of letters and newspapers he had laid on the manager's desk.

"When do you go for the next mail, Eddie?"

"Eleven o'clock."

Bob returned to his work, keeping a frequent eye on the clock.

It wanted a minute of eleven when the foreman called the boy and told him to go down to the engine-room, which was a single story annex to the mill itself, and fetch a certain tool he wanted.

Bob hustled to obey this order.

As he passed around on the outside of the building he looked in at the window of the manager's office.

Mr. Wells was at his desk.

"I haven't any time to lose," breathed Bob, hurrying on to the engine-room.

The tool he came for was not found at once, and he had to wait about until the engineer got ready to look it up.

This caused a delay of more than fifteen minutes, and the boy stood around in a fever of impatience until the implement was finally put in his hands.

Then he started back as fast as he could go.

As he repassed the private office window he glanced in again.

The manager was holding an oblong package in his two hands, apparently looking at the address on it.

"Great Scott!" breathed Bob, excitedly. "Suppose that should happen to be the box sent by Jim Flanders? I must warn him without a moment's delay."

He would have rapped on the window, but he couldn't approach it on account of several cases which stood in the way.

So he did the only thing that occurred to him.

He rushed for the door of the outer office.

Ogden Wells was generally at his desk at nine o'clock in the morning.

This particular day was an exception.

He had gone up to Boston on the previous afternoon to make a provisional arrangement with a well-known agency to supply him with hands in the event that the mill employes went on strike on the first of the month.

Judging from the temper of the old hands, as well as from information of what had taken place at their last meeting, which was secretly obtained for him, he believed a strike was imminent.

So he took time by the forelock, in order to be prepared for any emergency.

The train from Boston reached Bayport at 10.45, and Mr. Wells was at his desk a couple of minutes before eleven.

He found the mail, as usual, piled upon his desk.

He put the papers aside and read the letters, making notes for replies.

Then he called his stenographer and dictated half a dozen brief answers.

While thus engaged, Eddie, the office-boy, brought in the second mail.

This consisted of three letters, a paper and an oblong package—the latter strongly and carefully wrapped and corded.

After going through the letters, Mr. Wells took up the package and looked at it.

The address itself was written on heavy envelope paper and pasted on the package wrapper and part of an old postmark appeared at one corner.

Underneath the address was written in a heavy hand, diagonally across the face of the package, the word "Samples."

Mr. Wells turned it over once or twice in his hands and then looked for his shears.

They were not where he usually kept them, but after a few moments' delay he discovered them in his letter-basket tray on top of his desk.

The manager was about to cut the cords which secured the wrapper, when the door of the office was suddenly dashed open and Bob Chambers rushed in.

"Stop, for heaven's sake!" he cried, earnestly. "That package contains an infernal machine!"

The boy's whirlwind entrance, and his startling words, produced a sensation in the private office.

Ogden Wells, the shears poised in one hand, the package in the other, looked at the young intruder in surprise.

The head bookkeeper, who had entered the room a few minutes before for some document he required, turned around and eyed Bob, with a look of consternation in his face; while the pretty stenographer, who was on the way to the manager's desk with some typewritten letters in her hand, stopped short and gave a little shriek of terror.

But Bob didn't stop until he reached Mr. Wells's side, and then pointing at the unopened package in the manager's hand, said:

"Don't open that! It's dangerous, sir. There's some kind of apparatus in it which is arranged to explode and kill you the moment you take off the cover."

Ogden Wells was not a coward.

He was cool and collected under the most trying circumstances.

He looked calmly at the boy's flushed and excited face, and then said:

"How do you know?"

"I'll tell you the whole story if you'll let me, sir."

"Certainly. Bring up a chair and I will listen to you."

He put down the package as he spoke and waited for Bob's explanation.

"Do not be alarmed, Miss Sutton," he added, turning to his stenographer, whose frightened countenance at that moment attracted his notice. "You may hand me those letters."

The girl gave him the sheets she had in her hand, and then returned to her desk, but she was clearly incapable of going on with her work for the present.

Bob took his seat by the manager's side and detailed to him what he had overheard in the deserted shed the night before; how Flanders caught him hiding behind the barrel, and what he and his companion, Luke Sparrow, had afterward done to him for the purpose of closing his mouth forever.

"I was discovered on the track by Andy Ball and Jake Switzer, and they are ready to testify to that fact."

Ogden Wells heard the boy through without interrupting him.

Then he questioned Bob on several points not quite clear to him.

Without making any comment on the story he drew his office telephone, which connected him with the various departments of the mill, toward him, and putting the stopper in a certain hole, placed the receiver to his ear.

He had placed himself in communication with the packing department.

"Are Flanders and Sparrow at work this morning?" he asked, in reply to a distant, "Well, sir?"

"No, sir. They've never been both away at the same time before."

"That is all," replied the manager, who then connected with another department.

"Is Switzer on your floor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Send him to the office, please."

A similar message was sent to the shuttle-room for Bob. Both of the boys appeared together, and were admitted to the private office at once.

They corroborated Bob's statement that they had found him in a semi-unconscious condition on one of the tracks of the Eastern Railroad in the cut outside the town limits.

Manager Wells dismissed Andy and Jake with the caution not to open their mouths on the subject.

Then he telephoned for an officer of the police.

One of the Bayport force soon appeared.

"I have reason to believe that this package contains some

kind of a bomb or infernal machine. As it came through the mail, I don't think there is any danger of it exploding through mere handling in its present shape; but to be on the safe side I would advise you to carry it carefully. Take it to the station and soak it well. I will follow you presently to consult with the captain about it."

The policeman didn't relish the job; but it was in the line of his duty, and he couldn't well refuse to accept the dangerous package.

He carried it gingerly out of the building, to the immense relief of the stenographer especially, who hadn't been easy in her mind from the moment Bob entered the room and made his sensational announcement.

"Now, Chambers," said Manager Wells, "take off your working rig; I want you to go with me to the police station."

He had already thanked and complimented the boy for the part he had played in the affair, and promised to see that he was rewarded.

Bob protested that he didn't want any reward, as he believed he had only done his duty; but the manager assured him that the awful risk he had faced in connection with the matter entitled him to something more substantial than an ordinary vote of thanks, and he would see that he got it.

At the police station, Bob told his story over again to the captain of the force, who immediately issued an order for the arrest of Jim Flanders and Luke Sparrow, and officers were sent out to find the two rascals.

After the package had been soaked for an hour in a pail of water, the wrapper was carefully removed and the contents found to be a wooden box six inches long, two inches wide and an inch deep.

This was replaced in the pail and soaked a considerable while longer.

The box had a sliding cover, but instead of opening it in the regular way, the cover was pried off, when the true character of the package was revealed.

There were two parlor matches set heads downward in the sliding cover of the box, so that when the cover was withdrawn the heads of the matches would ignite by striking on slips of emery paper in the bottom.

Packed in brownish cotton in the box was a small cylinder of cardboard containing gunpowder, plugged at the ends with cotton.

In one end of the box were two 32-caliber revolver cartridges, with notches filed in the rims of the shells in such a manner as to expose the powder.

There were also several slugs of lead, irregular in shape, loose in the box.

"Well," remarked Ogden Wells, when he was called to examine the contents of the box, "that is a most ingenious bomb. It wouldn't have done a thing to me if it had exploded in my hands."

"That's right," replied the police captain, "it would have laid you out for keeps. You owe your life to that boy."

And Mr. Wells agreed with him.

CHAPTER X.

BOB IS REWARDED.

Jim Flanders and Luke Sparrow were not arrested, according to programme.

From some unknown friend they got warning in the nick of time to save themselves, and while the officers were entering the house where the men had slept off their drunk, by the front door, they slipped out by the back way, so that when the policemen went to Flanders's room the birds had flown.

The town was searched for them, but they managed to get off.

Ogden Wells called on Duncan Pritchard at his home, and told him the story of the infernal machine.

He suggested that the company ought to reward Bob Chambers for his zeal in preventing a terrible catastrophe.

Mr. Pritchard agreed with him, and instructed the treasurer by telephone to draw a check for \$1,000, payable to the order of the boy, and send it to him for his signature, as all the company's checks had to be countersigned by its president.

That afternoon the check was sent to the manager, who called Bob to his office and handed it to him, together with a neat gold watch and chain from himself as an expression of his gratitude to the lad for saving his life.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Wells," said Bob, accepting the testimonial. "I shall place great value upon this watch as coming from you."

"It is very insignificant in comparison with the obligation you have placed me under by your brave and manly conduct. You will please remember you have always a friend in me henceforth."

Of course, Bob couldn't keep the facts from his mother and sister now, for the evening paper had a full account of his adventure, which led to his saving the life of the manager of the Bayport Woolen Mills from the infernal machine, which came through the mails, and by nightfall all Bayport was talking about the boy and the affair.

"And you never said a word to us this morning about the awful experience you went through last night," said his sister, as soon as he came home that evening.

"Oh, Robert, how could you keep us ignorant of your peril!" cried his mother, stroking his hair and kissing him fondly, the tears coursing down her cheeks.

"For the very best of reasons, mother—I didn't want to worry you. But it had to come out, you see. However, I'm all right; haven't even slipped a cog, so what's the use saying anything more about it?"

"But it's so terrible to think that you might have been killed and mangled in a frightful way, and nobody could have guessed the cause of it all."

"That's true, mother; but as long as it didn't occur you have no cause for worry. A miss is as good as a mile."

"You take it very easy, you bad boy!" cried Hattie,

throwing her arms around his neck for the second time and hugging him as if she never meant to quit.

"Come now, Hat, it's awfully nice of you to hug me, but you might reserve a little of it for Parker Jewett, when the time comes," with a provoking smile.

"Aren't you too mean for anything!" cried the girl, blushing furiously.

"Don't say a word, folks, see what I have got," and Bob exhibited his handsome gold watch and chain and his check for \$1,000 from the company. "Don't that make your mouth water, sis?"

Mother and daughter were simply delighted, and perhaps they were not proud of the fortunate son and brother!

That night Bob was welcomed at the club by a full house.

As soon as he appeared in the room somebody called for three cheers for the president, and they were given with a will that raised the dust from the uncarpeted floor, and jarred the atmosphere so that the flags and draperies waved to and fro while the din lasted.

"I ped me your life you vos der whole ding py der town do-night, ain'd it?" said Jake, his full-moon countenance expanding in a broad grin.

"Oh, come now!" remonstrated Bob, "you fellows will give me the swelled head if you don't quit. Any one of you boys would have done exactly as I did under the circumstances."

"Ve vould, I don'd think! It looks a prave poy mid a glass eye to done vot you dit, I ped you."

"All right. Let it go at that."

Next day when Bob appeared at the mill he was regarded by all hands as a hero.

There were smiles and nods, and an occasional congratulatory word for him on all sides.

The girls certainly looked on him with a new interest, while Ruby Norton was sure there wasn't another boy like him in the world.

About the end of the week there was another big meeting of the mill hands, and it was unanimously voted to go on strike if the new wage scale was enforced on the first of the month.

A new committee was appointed to wait on Manager Wells and present this ultimatum.

President Pritchard was in the manager's office when the committee presented themselves.

When Mr. Wells assured the mill hands' representatives that the cut would certainly go into effect as announced, the spokesman of the committee said:

"Then, sir, I am instructed to inform you that the hands will strike in a body."

"Strike, will you?" exclaimed Duncan Pritchard, who had been an impatient listener during the brief interview, in an angry tone. "We'll fill the places of every one of you."

The spokesman smiled grimly, but made no reply.

"Perhaps you think we can't?" almost shouted the official head of the woolen mill. "Remember, every man and woman of you who fails to report as usual for duty next Monday morning will consider themselves discharged. Dis-

charged, do you hear? And you won't be taken back, either—not one of you. Not if you come a-begging for your jobs!"

And Duncan Pritchard shook his finger menacingly at the committee.

"It is quite out of my power to alter the mandate of the stockholders of this company," concluded Ogden Wells. "They have adopted the new rate, and I am obliged to put it into effect. Of course, if the hands quit work I shall try to get new ones to fill their places. It seems to me foolish for you people to strike—nine out of ten strikes are failures."

The manager turned to his desk, as a signal that the interview was at an end, and the committee retired.

That afternoon's paper contained the statement that the manager of the Bayport Woolen Mills had refused to make any concessions in regard to the new wage schedule which was to go into operation on Monday, and in consequence the old hands would certainly go out on strike.

This announcement created quite a breeze of excitement in the little New England town, and people began to ask one another what course the strikers would take, and whether there would be any disturbance.

When the girls filed past the pay-window Saturday afternoon and received their envelopes, it was noticed that every one of them carried with her a small bundle of her belongings she was accustomed to keep in the mill.

The men also brought away all their personal property.

This significant fact was reported to Manager Wells, who accepted it as conclusive evidence that none of the regular employees would report for work on Monday.

Before he went home for the day he sent a telegram to the Boston agency which had contracted to furnish him with all the help he required.

That afternoon it was noticed that Dexter Pritchard, as he paraded up and down Main Street with his little Malacca cane, wore a self-satisfied grin on his face.

He was pleased to death that there was going to be a strike at the mill.

And chiefly because it would put Ruby Norton out of a job.

He had failed in his attempt to get her discharged.

"I hate her!" he muttered to himself. "She puts on too many lugs for a common mill hand. The strike will be a failure, anyway, and she won't be able to get back. I guess she'll have to get out of town or starve. If she'd acted decent with me I'd stand by her now. She's gone on that Bob Chambers. He's another person I'd give something to do up. The people seem to be making a great fuss over him because he found out about that infernal machine. They make me sick. Well, I guess he'll be out of a job same as the rest. But I don't suppose he'll care, for he's got \$1,000 to fall back on. My governor was a fool to hand him out so much. One hundred dollars would have been loads, to my way of thinking. If I could only queer him and Ruby Norton I'd feel better satisfied. Perhaps I can—who knows?"

With this charitable feeling in his heart he continued his promenade as far as the Bayport Billiard Parlors, where he turned in, and finding some of his boon companions there, took a hand at a game of pool.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STRIKE.

Long before seven o'clock on Monday morning small groups of the strikers began to gather in the immediate vicinity of the mill.

At half-past six, when the smoke usually began to pour out of the tall chimney there wasn't even a whisp of vapor to be seen.

The engineer and his assistant had joined the old hands, and there was nothing doing in the engine-room.

By and by the timekeeper appeared at the gate, and he was greeted by a chorus of derision from the younger fry standing near.

Among these were Jake Switzer and Andy Ball.

"Vell," remarked Jake, "vy you don't got busy, Yohn Thomas? Vot you vos hired for, anyvays? To stood py dot obenings und look oud? Maype you vos looking for der beoples to come, ain'd id? Vell, off you look long enough you vill seen 'em pefore Ghristmas, I don'd think."

The timekeeper grinned, but made no reply.

"I don'd hear me dose vistles," went on Jake, making a bluff of listening. "Id vos seven py der glock yust now. Vot's der madder py der engine-room? Maype der boilers vos on der strike, too."

"Here comes the manager," piped up Andy.

Ogden Wells was walking smartly down the street toward the mill.

By this time there were more than sixty of the old employees near the gate.

The manager paid no attention to them, but entered the yard after exchanging a word with the timekeeper.

At half-past seven he left by the office entrance and started toward the railroad station.

The 7.45 train from Boston brought about fifty men and girls from Boston who had been sent to take the places of the strikers.

Manager Wells and two policemen met them and piloted them to the mill.

Their appearance was greeted by a chorus of hoots and groans from the strikers, now augmented to more than a hundred, who had formed a lane from the gate to the street corner, and through which the newcomers had to pass.

The majority of the old hands contented themselves with viewing the strike-breakers with solemn displeasure, making no effort to prevent them from entering the mill yard.

Whether they were deterred by the presence of Ogden Wells, whose face wore a resolute look, or the two policemen, or because their leaders had instructed them not to

make a disturbance, certain it is they made no demonstration beyond the few hoots and groans here and there.

As the last new hand passed inside, Andy yelled out:

"Three groans for Ogden Wells!"

The crowd right around him took the cue and groaned lustily, and the sound rolled right along down the two lines.

At this moment Bob Chambers and Ruby Norton came walking slowly down the street.

They did not mingle with the others, but stood on the other side of the way and watched the proceedings with much interest.

As the mob broke up into groups again, Jake and Andy saw Bob and Ruby, and joined them.

"Did you seen 'em?—dose new handts?" asked Switzer.

"No," replied Bob.

"Dey don'd last, I ped you."

"That's right," chirped Andy. "We won't do a thing to them when we get the chance."

"Better keep out of trouble, Andy," advised Bob. "You know what the orders are. No rough-house, or anything of that kind."

"Are we going to let these newcomers keep our jobs from us? Well, I guess not!" and Andy looked as if he was just aching for a scrap.

"There's a big committee appointed to look after that," said Bob. "We can't win by raising a rumpus."

"They've no business comin' here when they know there's a strike on," persisted Bob.

"What's the use kicking? You'll always find lots to do that in every trade."

"Then they ought to be treated as they deserve, that's what I say."

"Vot you dinks apoud id, Miss Ruby?" asked Jake.

"I think it's a shame that the company cut our wages and made us go out in self-defense," she replied, spiritedly.

"Py shinsher! You vomens ought to got ub a processions, und valk py der bresident's house, und spoke to him yust somedings like dot. Maype some imbressions id vould make on him, ain'd id?"

"I'm afraid not," said Bob. "Duncan Pritchard isn't the kind of man that's easily moved from his purpose. I understand he's at the bottom of the reduction. If so, the women and girls would only be wasting their breath on him."

"Vell, a man dot vould all der brofits dook vos a hogs, und I yust as soon said dot py his face."

"Betcher life he is!" chimed in Andy.

Another chorus of hootings from the workers attracted their attention.

This was occasioned by the appearance of a dozen women and girls who had come over from Marshfield in a wagon.

The strikers blocked the way of the vehicle and the occupants began to grow frightened, though no actual violence was intended.

They were beset on all sides by requests from the old hands to go back.

The driver tried to urge his horses forward, but could make no headway through the crowd.

Some threats were uttered, and several sticks were waved in the air by way of intimidation, then two strikers began to push the animals around.

At this point Ogden Wells and one of the officers appeared at the gate and came to the rescue.

They were greeted by hoots and catcalls, but that was the extent of the interference.

After much trouble the wagon was driven into the yard.

When it came out again empty, the driver was pelted by the many urchins about, with sticks and clods of earth.

The 9.50 Boston train brought in another lot of girls and a few men from the city, and a larger crowd of strikers being present, half a dozen policemen were called on to escort them to the mill.

They were received with many manifestations of anger and hostility by the old hands, but there was no actual collision.

"What do you want to come here and take honest folks' work for?" shouted the angry wife of one of the foremen.

"Aye, aye, aye!" echoed along the line.

"Stand back, there!" commanded the two officers in the lead.

"Wouldn't dose bolicemans make you sick?" said Jake, in a tone of disgust.

The crowd now seemed on the point of losing its temper, for it surged about, excitedly.

"Down with the scabs!" cried a stentorian voice.

A great uproar ensued, in the midst of which half a dozen men, in the form of a football flying wedge, pushed through the crowd, scattering strikers and newcomers right and left, and throwing the whole street into a scene of confusion.

The air was filled with shrieks, hoots and derisive laughter.

Manager Wells and the officers were mixed up and detached from the new hands and for a few moments a scene of pandemonium ensued.

When order was finally somewhat restored, more than half of the fresh arrivals had disappeared, and no one seemed to know where they had vanished to.

When the strikers realized this there was a great burst of cheering.

It was the first victory.

CHAPTER XII.

DEXTER PRITCHARD GETS UGLY.

The police now got busy in earnest, and drove the crowd of strikers away from the immediate neighborhood of the gate.

They were hooted and jeered at, and given as much trouble as possible, but no one ventured to resist them openly.

The smoke now began to pour out of the big chimney.

An engineer and fireman had been secured.

Just then a light buggy drove up to the office entrance of the mill.

In it were Duncan Pritchard and his son Dexter.

They were received with a howl of derision.

The elder Pritchard got out and entered the office, and then Dexter turned the horse around and started off up the street.

At the moment Ruby was crossing the road to speak to one of her friends.

Dexter saw her, and whipping up his spirited animal, deliberately ran her down.

At least that seemed to be his intention.

The three boys—Bob, Andy and Jake—happened to be looking at him at the time.

Andy and Jake threw up their hands and shouted to Ruby to look out.

Bob, however, with a cry of anger, rushed for the horse's head.

Ruby saw the animal almost upon her, and stood right where she was, paralyzed with fear.

Bob reached the spot not a moment too soon, and grasped the mare's bridle.

"Let that horse alone!" roared Dexter, furiously.

"What's the matter with you?" cried Bob. "Do you want to run over her?"

"Get out of my way, you beggar!" exclaimed the young aristocrat, snapping the whiplash about Bob's ears.

The young mill hand caught the lash with one hand and jerked the whip out of Dexter's hand.

"Give me my whip, you villain!" sputtered Dexter Pritchard, in a rage.

"Py shinsher! I vould gif you dot vhip in a vay you wouldn't like off I had id, I ped you!" shouted Jake, shaking his fist at the magnate's son.

Dexter, mad with anger, lashed his horse with the reins.

She reared up and tore herself free from Bob's hold, swerved to one side and dashed forward, just clearing the brave boy by a bare inch.

Ruby, with a little cry, fainted dead away in Bob's arms.

"Py Shorge!" cried Jake. "Dit you efer seen anydings like dot?"

"He ought to be kicked from here to the bay," said Andy, angrily.

"Vell, off I vos Bob Shambers I know vot I vould done to him vhen I seen dot snoozer again, I ped you. I vould leaf der mab off Yarmany by his face ubon."

Bob carried Ruby to the sidewalk, where several of her girl friends took charge of her.

"What the dickens did Dexter Pritchard mean?" asked the boy, in some excitement. "He might have killed or injured us both the way he acted. His father ought to be told of this. I won't stand for anything like that from anybody."

"Von vould dink he had took leaf off his senses."

"I'm going to have an explanation or I'll know the reason why," said Bob, resolutely.

"Dot's righd; but off you vos me I would lick him fe-erst und eggsplanations took after dot."

"I'll take this whip into the office and see Mr. Pritchard about the matter," and Bob, after seeing that Ruby had recovered, started to carry out his intention.

But the incident didn't stop there.

The affair had attracted the attention of many of the strikers, and they gathered around and wanted to know all about it.

Switzer and Andy Ball made no bones about what Dexter had done, in fact they represented the matter in its worst light.

Their story roused their listeners to a fever pitch of indignation, and Ruby's white face added to their anger.

One of the agitators in the crowd seized the chance to address the strikers in a revolutionary way, and he didn't have much trouble to arouse bad blood.

He handled the Pritchards without gloves, denounced the upper class generally, and did not forget to drag in Ogden Wells for a share of his venom.

There is little doubt but an incipient riot would have ensued if it hadn't been for the quick action of several of the leaders present, who, scenting trouble, hastened to address the crowd, begging their fellows to be calm and not allow themselves to be led into any act they would afterward regret.

This sensible course had the desired effect, and the mob cooled down.

Another batch of outsiders were brought to the mill during the afternoon, but they were not molested, though the strikers appealed to them not to go to the mill, without success.

The police maintained the utmost vigilance about the mill property, and kept the disgruntled old hands at a respectable distance.

Nearly all the girls and women left the neighborhood early, while the men remained to canvass the situation, and patronize the nearest saloon.

By five o'clock most of the crowd had dwindled away to the regular pickets, and the members of the committee who had the strike in charge.

They waited patiently about for the mill to shut down and the newcomers to come out, intending then to argue the matter with them.

This plan was frustrated by Ogden Wells, who had secured a big building near-by and turned it into a temporary boarding- and lodging-house.

When the new force knocked off, they were mustered in the yard and marched in a body, under police protection, to the building.

After they had entered, two policemen were left to stand guard at the door, and the strike committee, seeing the futility of further interference, withdrew with the pickets until morning.

In the meantime, Bob Chambers obtained an interview with Duncan Pritchard and called his attention to the singular conduct of his son.

The magnate was rather annoyed at the incident, but naturally was inclined to gloss over Dexter's behavior.

"Ahem! young man, I think you are making a mountain out of a molehill," said Mr. Pritchard, loftily. "Why should my son try to run over Miss Norton, or, in fact, any one else? Why, the idea is ridiculous. The horse is a spirited one, and must have become frightened and somewhat unmanageable by the crowd in the street."

"There was no crowd in the street at that point. Ruby was crossing——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted the president of the company, impatiently; "but it is really preposterous to suppose that Dexter would deliberately try to do either of you an injury."

"Then, sir, you discredit my statement," replied the boy, indignantly.

"I certainly believe you are mistaken in the matter. By the way, I think you are the boy who warned Mr. Wells about that infernal machine, are you not?"

"I am, sir."

"You received \$1,000 from the company, did you not?"

"I received a check for that amount."

"Then let me say, young man, you have shown very poor taste—very poor taste, I repeat, by deserting the company with the rest of the men. Common gratitude should have suggested to you the propriety of sticking by those who so munificently—I believe that is the proper word—rewarded you. That is all young man. You may go."

The manager was present and heard the entire interview.

He nodded pleasantly to Bob when the boy was leaving the room, and Bob politely acknowledged his salutation.

"It is clear I haven't gained much by appealing to Mr. Duncan Pritchard," said the lad to himself. "I might have guessed he would have stood up for his son. I'll have to settle this case with Dexter myself."

"Vell, Boppy," asked Jake, when Bob rejoined his friends, "vot dit you done?"

"Not much," replied the boy, in a dissatisfied tone.

"Didn't I toldt you so, Andy? Vot would you opect from a big pud a grunt."

"Where's Ruby?" asked Bob, looking around.

"She went home with three of the girls, a while ago," answered Andy. "She's all broke up."

"Well, it's a shame. Dexter Pritchard shall answer for this."

"Off you vos me I wouldn't took no nonsense apoud id. I would stood py his neck on pretty soon alretty."

"That's right," nodded Andy. "He's down on Ruby, 'cause she wouldn't cotton to him. You remember what he said to her in front of the mill a couple of weeks ago. He's tryin' to get square. If Ruby was my girl I'd break his face for him if I got pulled in for it afterward."

"It wouldn't be any more than he deserves," replied Bob, as the boys started for their homes.

And thus ended the first day of the strike, as far as they were concerned.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SCRAP ON MAIN STREET.

By Wednesday, the third day of the strike, the company had managed to secure about two-thirds of the required help to run the mill.

That morning, however, the new engineer didn't show up, and the manager had to send to Boston for another, so that the machinery didn't get in motion till after the noon hour.

The Bayport Daily News, which published both a morning and afternoon edition, came out flat-footed for the strikers.

It printed a good deal of unpleasant reading matter for Duncan Pritchard and the stockholders of the company.

As almost every person in town sympathized more or less with the old hands, the owners of the mill experienced a coolness in the social and business atmosphere which they had never noticed before.

Some of the stockholders privately expressed regret that they had voted for the reduction.

Those who had voted against the cut took care to let the fact become known.

Duncan Pritchard, however, believed he could afford to defy public opinion.

When interviewed by the reporters he was aggressive and defiant.

He repeated his assertion that the old hands were out of the mill for good.

Dexter Pritchard owned a very handsome little sailboat, in which he and some of his friends cruised around the harbor, and sometimes along the coast outside, when the weather conditions were satisfactory to him.

On Wednesday afternoon he and two cronies left the Bayport Billiard Parlors and started for the private wharf on the Pritchard property, off which the "Spray" was anchored.

They were going to take a sail.

It happened that Bob Chambers, Andy Ball and Jake Switzer were coming out of their club as Dexter and his associates came along Main Street.

Bob, who was something of an amateur sailor in his way, had borrowed a catboat for that afternoon, and was going to take Andy and Jake down the bay with him.

As soon as Bob caught sight of the son of Duncan Pritchard he walked up and confronted him with a stern face.

"I want an explanation from you, Dexter Pritchard, of your attempt to ride over Ruby Norton on Monday," he demanded.

Dexter started back, glared at Bob, and raised his little Malacca cane in a threatening way.

"How dare you stop me on the street, you interfering puppy!" blustered the magnate's son.

Bob's eyes flashed at this insult, but he kept cool.

"I want an answer from you, Pritchard, and if it isn't satisfactory I'll see that Ruby has you arrested. You'll

find out you won't be permitted to endanger people's lives in this town merely to gratify a personal spite you have against them. And the fact that you are the son of the richest man in Bayport won't save you."

By this time Dexter's face was white with rage.

"You—you pauper! You common mill boy! I've a mind to strike you to the sidewalk!" he cried, passionately.

"You'd better not try such a thing if you know when you're well off," replied Bob, coolly.

Dexter's answer was to bring his upraised cane down full on the mill boy's head.

But it didn't land as the young aristocrat had intended.

Bob had seen his purpose in his eyes, dodged quickly, seized and tore the cane from his grasp, and promptly knocked Dexter down.

"It's a fight!" grinned Andy to Jake.

"I don't dink!" answered the German boy; "pud off it vos dot udder fellers don'd peen in id for a gobber cent."

Dexter looked dazed and confounded.

He hardly knew what had happened to him, the shock had come so sudden.

He sat up and stared stupidly about.

"Vill I hellup you ub?" asked Jake, making a bluff to offer his assistance, as the dude's companions stood well back and never offered to interfere. "I nefer expected to seen you seddin' yourseluf down py der sidevalks to rest, Misder Pritchard."

Dexter kicked out his legs with unexpected suddenness, and gave Switzer such a whack on the shins that the German lad lost his balance and sat down, too.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Andy. "I hope you didn't make a hole in the sidewalk, Jake."

A small-crowd began to gather to see the fun.

"Tunder und blitzen! Vot you beobles found to laugh ad?" cried Jake, in a tone of disgust, as he picked himself up.

Dexter also scrambled to his feet and shook his fist at Bob.

"I will make you pay for that, you villain!" he cried, furiously. "I'll have you arrested for striking me, you scum!"

"Bah! Why don't you put up your fists like a little man?" jeered Andy, who felt disappointed that the mix-up was so brief.

"Py shinsher! He can pud his feets ub like a liddle donkey, I ped you!" growled the German boy.

"Give me my cane!" roared Dexter, making a snatch at it.

Bob stepped back, deliberately broke it across his knee and threw the pieces into the street.

Dexter, almost wild with rage, rushed at Bob and struck at him with both fists, but the mill boy, with a smile, easily warded off the blows.

Then the magnate's son kicked viciously at him.

Bob caught his foot and he went down like a shot.

The crowd laughed and jeered at young Pritchard, whom they recognized.

The mill boy had their sympathy.

"Py Shorge! You don'd done dot twice dimes mid im-bunidy, I ped you. Der next dimes you pud mine shins against you feets I vill done dot, too."

"Come, let's go," said Bob to his two companions. "This little affair has attracted too much attention to suit me."

They pushed their way through the grinning mob, and were crossing the street when Dexter was assisted up by one of his friends.

The young dude was in a furious rage over his discomfiture.

Not seeing Bob, he glared at the circle of amused spectators, some of whom passed rather uncomplimentary remarks about him.

His friends, not relishing the situation, took hold of him and led him away.

They had all they could do to pacify him.

Finally he cooled down and the three continued on their way to the Pritchard grounds.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TAMING OF DEXTER PRITCHARD.

Two hours later a finely modeled sloop yacht, about eighteen feet in length, and a trim-built catboat, not quite so long, were nearing a wooded island at the entrance to Bayport harbor.

Both, under bellying mainsail, were heeled to starboard, and darted ahead before the stiff six-knot breeze blowing off shore.

The wind had steadily increased since the boats left their moorings, and Dexter Pritchard, who was steering the "Spray," was beginning to grow nervous.

He would have turned back, but he was ashamed to do so, as he had boasted of his ability to handle his yacht under all weather conditions.

Besides, she was practically safe, having four copper air-tanks, so that she would not sink with half a dozen persons aboard, if she were full of water.

Dexter, however, was by no means expert in the knack of sailing a boat, and now every time she made a sudden dip, when a sharp flaw struck the mainsail, he turned pale and wished he was on shore.

It was different with Bob Chambers, in the "Foam" catboat.

He had taken lessons from the boatman who owned the little craft, and who was very friendly with him, and was able to handle the boat almost as well as its owner.

He loved the water, and went out on the bay in the "Foam," or in swimming off the Point, whenever he got a chance.

The "Spray" was the faster boat of the two, but was handicapped under her green owner.

Dexter and his friends had got afloat first, yet by the

time the mouth of the bay was almost reached the catboat had overhauled and passed the "Spray" to the leeward.

"Shall we come about or go outside?" asked Bob, as they were passing abreast of the island. "It's pretty rough yonder, and will give us a good shaking up."

"Oh, keep right on!" replied Andy.

"I don'd know apoud dot," objected Jake. "Off id pen much rougher as here, you vill oxcoose me off I said nid."

"Ho! If you're afraid, we'll put you ashore on the island and take you up when we come back."

"I didn't said I vos afraidt; bud off id peen all der same I yust so soon stood by der beach ubon a liddle vholes mineseluf to resd."

"Hello!" cried Bob, at this juncture. "Those chaps yonder are in trouble."

He pointed to the "Spray," which was now floundering about in the trough of the sea, sweeping in from the Atlantic, her boom threshing the water way to the leeward.

The fact of the matter was a sudden flaw had wrenched the main-sheet out of Dexter Pritchard's hand, and the boom, in consequence, had got away from him.

It placed the party in an unpleasant position, which a skilful boatman would instantly have remedied by bringing the yacht up into the wind, when the boom would have swung back, and the sheet-line have been recovered.

It was a simple thing to do, but Dexter lost his head and became terrified when he ought to have remained cool.

He looked helplessly at the truant boom, and did nothing.

The "Spray" was steered by a horizontal wheel—the tiller moving in the direction opposite to the way the wheel was turned.

Finally, Dexter, in his confusion, did the right thing accidentally—he pulled the wheel toward him—he was seated on the weather side of the steering gear.

The boat at once answered to her helm and the boom swung in.

Before it came quite within his reach, he stood up and reached for the sheet.

Just then another flaw struck the sail, and away it went back again, for Dexter had let go of the wheel.

The boat dipped smartly to the leeward, the boy lost his balance and was precipitated overboard.

"By George!" cried Bob, who, with his companions, was watching the "Spray" intently. Dexter Pritchard is overboard!"

He altered the "Foam's" course at once, and bore down on the spot where the young aristocrat had disappeared beneath the rough water off the island.

"Py shinsher! He vos a gone goose, I ped you!" exclaimed the German boy, in some excitement.

"He is if he can't swim a little," said Andy.

"I don'd seen him, do you Boppy?"

"Yes, there he is, just a fathom or so beyond his hat."

"I vill got der poat-hooks und pull him oud, off he don'd gone py der bottoms too quick."

Before the "Foam" got close enough for the boys to reach Dexter, he disappeared once more.

"Dot's pad," cried Jake, when he saw the water close over Pritchard's head. "Do you dink he peen deat now for sure, Boppy?"

"I hope not," replied Bob, anxiously for he was all eagerness to save the life of his enemy. "He ought to come up again. Keep your eyes skinned for him, fellows; it's his last chance."

"There he is!" exclaimed Andy, presently.

Dexter had come up not six feet away.

"Py shinsher! I got him now, I ped you!" cried Switzer, reaching for the drowning boy with the boat-hook.

But he hadn't.

A flaw struck the "Foam," the boat dipped, and Bob had to luff her up.

The German boy, feeling he was losing his balance, dropped the hook into the water, where it sank at once, and grabbed Andy to save himself.

Bob saw that it was all up with Dexter unless he took the promptest kind of action.

"Take the helm, Andy!" he cried, in ringing tones.

Peeling off his hat and jacket, and kicking off his low-cut shoes, Bob plunged into the water, diving straight at young Pritchard, who, now quite unconscious, was slowly sinking for the last time.

He caught the boy a foot under the surface and came to the top with him.

As soon as he appeared, Jake flung a rope to him, which he caught.

Inside of a minute the two were dragged into the cockpit of the "Foam."

"Py Shimmany cribs! Dot vos a narrow squeak for Misdre Pritchard, I ped you!"

"We'll have to go ashore," said Bob, "and bring Dexter to his senses."

They laid the half-drowned boy face downward in the cockpit and about half a pint of salt water ran out of his mouth.

Bob ran the catboat under the lee of the outermost point of the island, and held her close to the beach, while Andy and Jake carried Dexter ashore.

Then, after telling them what to do with their charge, he steered out after the "Spray," which still rolled about at the mercy of the waves, and was drifting out to sea, the boys on board of her not knowing what to do in the emergency.

As he approached her stern from the leeward, Bob watched his chance, let his mainsail down by the run, and then leaped aboard of the "Spray," with the painter of the "Foam" in his hand.

It was a risky move, but the only thing to be done under the circumstances.

If he hadn't timed his movements to a nicety he would probably have landed in the water instead of where he aimed for.

With Bob it was then but the work of a moment to recover the stray boom and sheet.

After that he sailed the "Spray" to the island, towing the

catboat after her, and secured both craft to the beach by passing their painters around a big stone.

Dexter's friends were pretty well frightened by their recent experience, and were glad to feel the solid earth under their feet once more.

Pritchard was brought around after a time, but he was a pretty fishy-looking object.

"Vell, how you feldt now?" Jake asked him as soon as he was able to sit up.

His arrogant manner had completely disappeared, and he was as humble as any boy could be.

He seemed to realize that he had escaped death by the skin of his teeth, and that fact made a powerful impression on him.

When one of his cronies told him that Bob Chambers, at the risk of his own life, had saved him from a watery grave, he didn't say a word for some time.

Finally he motioned to Bob, who was wringing the water out of his garments, and the mill boy, curious to hear what he had to say, went up to him.

"I want to thank you for what you did for me," he said, in a low voice, with downcast eyes. "I don't see how you came to do it, as I haven't been a friend of yours. But you shan't regret it. I'll make it all right by you—at least my father will. I'll see that he gives you another \$1,000. He can afford it."

"Stop!" cried Bob. "You mustn't talk about paying me for what I did for you. I'm not such a cannibal as to see you or any one else drown if I could help it. I'm glad I managed to save you. I don't expect, nor will I accept, anything but your gratitude, if it's in you, for my services, which you are welcome to."

"I suppose you've a right to be down on me," answered Dexter, without looking up.

"I'm not down on you. I'm satisfied to let the past go if you say so."

"I'm willing to be friends if you are," Pritchard said at last, though the word evidently cost him an effort.

"I'm afraid you'll change your mind when you get over this shock," answered Bob, doubtfully.

"No, I won't. I mean what I say. You've done me a good turn—you've saved my life. You might have let me drown after the way I've treated you. You're different from any of the other fellows I know. I'm going to be your friend if you'll let me. I'll see that you get back in the mill, and that Ruby Norton does, too, and your friends here also. My father will do anything I want."

"Well, if you want to be friendly with me I'm not going to object. I'm only a mill boy, you know, and not in your social class."

"That doesn't make any difference with me as far as you are concerned, Bob Chambers. Will you shake hands with me?"

"Certainly," and Bob held out his hand.

Dexter got up and took it.

"We are friends now from this out," he said, with an earnestness strangely at variance with his old-time manners; and Bob wondered how long his regeneration would last.

CHAPTER XV.

BOB MEETS WITH A SURPRISE.

It was getting near sundown and Bob proposed that they ought to return to town.

Dexter Pritchard protested that he couldn't think of going back till he had dried his clothes.

So all hands gathered a quantity of brush and driftwood and made a bonfire.

While their garments were being dried, Bob and Dexter took refuge in the handsome little cabin of the "Spray," where the two boys talked together as if they had been old friends instead of recent enemies.

"Where's Jake?" asked Bob, while he was putting on his dry clothes.

"He saw a squirrel on that log yonder, and gave chase to it," laughed Andy. "He's the craziest fellow I ever saw."

"Hi, Jake!" shouted Bob, fashioning his hands into a speaking trumpet. "We're waiting for you."

All the same Switzer didn't answer, nor did he appear within the next ten minutes, although all hands yelled to him several times.

"Where the dickens can he have got to?" said Bob. "We'll have to hunt him up, for it's time we got a move on."

Leaving Dexter seated on a rock, the rest of the boys scattered through the brush and the wood beyond, yelling, "Jake!" every once and a while; but never a sign of the German boy did they see.

Bob followed a sort of ravine among the rocks and scrub leading toward the center of the island, and got separated more and more from the other three.

Suddenly, as he turned the corner of a big rock he ran smack into the arms of a man.

Before he knew what was in the wind, he was thrown down, his arms secured behind, and a handkerchief tied tightly over his mouth.

Two men had hold of him, and it didn't take but a glance for him to recognize them.

They were Jake Flanders and Luke Sparrow, and they looked the very picture of hard luck.

"So we've got hold of you ag'in, eh?" said Flanders, with a malicious grin. "You put a spoke in our wheel a week ago, and we had to cut town at a lively gait. How you managed to escape the wheels of that freight beats me, but it seems you did. We've been watchin' you chaps since you landed on the island, and a-figgerin' how we could put our flukes onto you, and now you kindly walks into our parlor as the fly did to the spider. Now we've got you where the hair is short, we'll pay off the score we've ag'in you."

"What are you goin' to do to him, Jim?" asked Sparrow.

"What should we do to him after he went and sp'iled that scheme of ours to do up Wells and got us spotted by the p'lice?" said Flanders, savagely.

Sparrow regarded the boy vindictively, but didn't say anything.

"We've ketched him jest in time, seein' as we were goin' to cut and run to-night after we've fixed that job at the mill. It'll be a satisfaction to know we've got square with this young jigger."

Flanders yanked Bob along by the collar, as if he were a bale of goods, and thrust him through the bushes into a dark aperture among the rocks, where they left him.

In the meantime the rest of the boys came upon Jake, watching the end of an old decayed log into which the squirrel he was after had disappeared.

They soon found there was an opening at the other end through which the cute little animal had got away, and they gave Switzer the laugh.

Then they returned to the shore, where they waited for Bob to turn up.

It was now beginning to grow dark, and Dexter decided that he couldn't wait on the island any longer.

So he and his friends embarked on the "Spray" and started for town, leaving Andy and the German boy wondering what had become of Bob.

"Vot you dinks, Andy, do we staid here all night?" asked Jake, when the gloom grew deep on the surface of the bay.

"Search me, Jake. We can't go without Bob."

"Dot's right; bud where he has tooken himseluf off do, dot's der questions."

"Ask me somethin' easier."

"Maype he felled down somevheres among der rocks, vot you dinks?" asked Jake, a bit anxiously.

"I hope not. It's all your fault, anyway, for chasin' that squirrel," growled Andy. "What did you do such a fool thing for?"

"For vhy did I done id? I haf a veaknesses for a life squirrel."

Andy snorted and kicked a hole in the sand with his heels.

As time passed, the boys grew more anxious and impatient.

They kept the fire on the beach up, to let the absent Bob know they were waiting for him, as well as to serve as a guide for him.

"I don't see how we can go and hunt him up in the dark," said Andy. "It will be a nice thing if an accident has happened to him."

"Couldn't ve dook a lanterns mit us?" suggested Jake. "Dere vos one py der poat cabins."

"We ought to do somethin'," said Andy, who was greatly perplexed over the situation.

Finally he decided to get the lantern, and go off and search the island with Jake.

They piled a lot of fresh fuel on the fire, including a good-sized log, and then started on their quest.

They came to the ravine which Bob had entered and stumbled along through the brush and rocks, swinging the lantern to and fro.

"Dis peen der vorstest shobs I efer seen, I ped me your life," said Jake.

At that moment he tripped over a tough creeper running across his path and pitched against the side of the ravine. "Shimmanny cribs! Hellup!"

Sandy stopped and swung the light of the lantern in that direction.

Half of the German boy's body had vanished through the bushes and he was beating the night air with his heels.

His voice came to Andy in a muffled strain, as if he was half-smothered in a hole.

Andy put the lantern down and dragged him out of his predicament by the heels.

Jake's face was scratched and covered with soft dirt.

"Well, you're a sight for sore eyes," growled Andy.

Switzer spat out a mouthful of dirt, with a grimace.

"Don'd say nottings, bud gif me der light. Dere vos somedings alive in dot holes, und id don'd peen an animals, neider."

"What are you givin' me?" replied Andy, incredulously.

"You waits a liddle."

He bent down the bushes, and the lantern rays disclosed a yawning hole among the rocks.

Jake thrust the lantern into the aperture and then gave a yell.

"Py shinsher! Off dot ain'd Boppy in dere, you vos a liar!"

"Get out!" cried Andy, in some excitement.

"Vell, dook a look vor yourseluf, off you don'd pelief id."

Andy got down on his hands and knees and looked into the hole.

"By jingo! It is, for a fact. What's he doin' in there, with a handkerchief over his mouth and his hands behind him?"

Bob heard them outside and kicked vigorously with his legs.

"Dit you efer seen anydings like dot?" cried the German boy. "He is kickin' his feet like fun. Somedings vos der madder mid him. Grab his feet und ve haf him oud righdt away quick."

Each caught one of Bob's limbs and pulled.

Out he glided into the circle of lantern light.

"Why, he's bound and gagged!" exclaimed Andy, in amazement.

The German boy's eyes stuck out like goggles.

Andy yanked the handkerchief off Bob's mouth and then fished in his pocket for his knife.

"Thanks, old man," said Bob, drawing a long breath of relief.

"How came you to be in this shape, Bob?" asked Andy, as he cut away at the cord which held his friend's hands. "Who did this?"

"Who did it? Jim Flanders and Luke Sparrow. They've been hiding on this island since they skipped from the police," replied Bob, regaining his feet.

"You don'd said so!" ejaculated Jake.

"Hidin' on the island, are they," cried Andy. "Then we'll hurry back to town and send the cops down here after them."

"I'm afraid that won't do any good now," replied Bob, shaking his head.

"Why not?"

"Because I guess they've gone away by this time. They've got a boat somewhere along shore. I heard them say they were goin' to leave this section to-night. Before they go they're going to do something to the mill. Set it afire, I dare say, if they can manage it. We must prevent them."

"But why did they tie and gag you, and stow you into that hole?"

"In revenge for my exposure of that infernal-machine plot of theirs."

"Great Caesar's ghost! You might never have been found till long after you had starved to death. What cold-blooded rascals they are!"

"They meant to do me up all right," said Bob, as the three came in sight of the glowing embers of the bonfire.

"Und dey meant to done you ub dot nights dey pud you py der tracks on in der cud. Vell, id's a fine dings do peen borned luggy, I ped you. You fall your feets on efery dime, Boppy."

"Why, where is the boat?" asked Bob, looking around the spot where the "Foam" had been moored.

Jake and Andy looked, too.

The catboat had mysteriously vanished.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

"I believe those chaps have taken our boat," said Bob at last.

"Glory halleluyah! What are we goin' to do, then?" gasped Andy, in dismay.

"Yah. Ve are left behindt in der soub."

"This is tough," remarked Bob, looking at the blank faces of his friends.

"I should say it is," grumbled Andy.

"Vell, I ped you."

"If Flanders and Sparrow took the catboat they must have left their own boat somewhere about. They never could have come to this island without one."

"Most likely it was a rowboat," said Andy. "That's why they sneaked the 'Foam.'"

"No matter what it is, we must hunt it up if we want to get away from this place to-night. I'm anxious to prevent those rascals doing any injury to the mill. If it burned down, people would say the strikers set it on fire, and it would be bound to hurt us."

"It would that," admitted Andy.

"Well, come along; we'll examine the shore, and see if we can find a boat of any kind," said Bob, starting forward along the water's edge with the lantern.

They walked half-way around the island before their

search was rewarded by the discovery of a small flatboat drawn up on the beach of a little cove.

One pair of rudely-made oars lay under the water which half-filled her.

"She's a peach of a boat to get back to town in," remarked Andy, regarding the shaky-looking craft with disgust. "We'd be swamped before we got half-way there."

"We can do better than that," said Bob. "We'll row over to yonder shore, which isn't more than half a mile away, and walk to town."

"That's a pretty big walk, I'm thinkin'," grumbled Andy.

"It is; but what else can we do?"

"Dot's rightdt. Off ve could valk der whole vays I would sooner done id," said Switzer, who preferred the land, any day, to the water.

Under Bob's directions they lifted the flatboat on edge and dumped out the water that had accumulated in her.

Then, after a great deal of trouble, they shoved her afloat.

Each of the lads took a turn at the oars, for though the distance was short from this point of the island to the main shore, the boat was clumsy and made slow progress against the tide which was running out.

It was after ten o'clock when they landed.

They started for town, following the shore line, but had to go out of their way all of two miles in covering an indentation, which butted in like a horseshoe.

When they had gone half-way they were stopped by a creek too deep to wade, and they had to follow it a mile before a rude bridge enabled them to cross.

By the time they reached the vicinity of the mill it was past midnight.

The big brick structure, surrounded by its tall, white-washed fence, loomed up before them dark and silent.

"Andy, you go to the police-station, and tell the officer in charge that Jim Flanders and Luke Sparrow are in this neighborhood, and have designs on the mill to-night," said Bob.

Andy immediately started on his errand.

"Now, Jake, you go down to yonder corner of the fence and keep your eyes wide open for intruders. Those fellows will have to scale the fence to get inside the enclosure. If you see anything suspicious come back and let me know."

Bob, left alone, crouched down at the corner and kept a close watch on two sides of the mill property.

It was not a bright night.

The sky was overcast, and a light mist hung in the air, making it difficult to see objects clearly at any distance.

Presently Bob's heart gave a jump.

Two forms came slouching up from the road.

They passed within two yards of the boy without noticing him.

Bob immediately identified them as Flanders and Sparrow.

They sneaked along the fence, the boy creeping after them, till they came to the small gate beyond the engine-house.

Here they paused, and soon Bob heard the cracking of wood.

The door was forced and the rascals vanished inside the enclosure.

The boy cautiously followed.

Flanders and his pal knew their way like a book, and headed for a window opening into the packing-room on the ground floor.

The windows were not protected by bars, only the usual catch holding the sashes together.

The catch of one of these windows was broken, and had not been repaired.

Flanders and Sparrow knew about this, and they slunk up to that particular window.

They raised the lower sash and entered, shutting it down again.

Bob came up and tried to peer through the glass.

All was dark inside.

"That room is full of inflammable material," breathed the boy, "and those chaps know every nook and corner about the place. I must find the watchman."

He ran quickly from point to point, without seeing the night guardian.

At length he reached the side door of the office.

There he found the watchman seated on the step with his head against the jamb.

He was snoring loudly.

"Well, you're a pretty fellow to guard other people's property," cried the boy, with a look of disgust. "Wake up!" he shouted in the man's ear, at the same time shaking him violently.

The watchman didn't wake worth a cent.

Bob bent down and caught the overpowering fumes of liquor from his mouth.

"Intoxicated!" gasped Bob, "and at the moment when he's most wanted. What shall I do? The police won't be here for a while yet. Ten minutes will be enough time for those scoundrels to set a blaze that will finish the mill."

Bob tried the side door and found it unlocked.

He stepped over the watchman's inert body and entered the building.

Then he removed his shoes and moved quietly in the direction of the packing-room, where the danger threatened.

He paused at the door and listened.

He could hear nothing.

With much caution he opened the door and entered.

Then he could make out the two rascals moving about at one end of the room.

Presently a match was struck and soon little spurts of flame began to curl up around a pile of shavings and wood in the midst of a lot of empty cases.

The peril of the building was imminent.

Throwing every other consideration to the winds, Bob dashed forward with a wild whoop.

The startled rascals darted for the window to escape, while Bob devoted his energies to trying to subdue the rising flames.

Flanders then noticed that the boy was alone, and he stopped his companion's headlong rush with an oath.

"It's only a boy," he grated to Sparrow. "Come back."

They dashed at Bob like a pair of enraged tigers.

He saw them coming and snatched up a stick of wood to defend himself.

The light of the fire flashed in his face and they recognized him.

"You here!" roared Flanders, with another oath, both he and Sparrow staggered at sight of the boy they thought safely secured on the island.

"Yes, I'm here," replied Bob, fearlessly, "and the police will be here in a moment, too."

"They will, eh?" hissed Flanders. "Blast you! for the interferer you are! I'll kill you this time if I never draw another breath."

He tried to grapple with Bob, but the lad eluded his grasp.

"Catch him, Sparrow, and brain him."

Sparrow seized a stick and struck at Bob.

The boy warded off the blow, but its force sent him staggering against a pile of boxes.

He slipped and went down.

"Now we have him!" cried Flanders.

The two rushed upon him, when the boxes above, that had been so rudely shaken, toppled over and fell with a crash, burying the villains under them.

Bob, half stunned, crawled out from under, the blood streaming from a nasty wound on his head.

Flanders and Sparrow never made a move.

Seeing the fire was beyond his efforts to subdue, Bob reeled out of the room, staggered to the door of the office, burst it in, ran to the telephone and sent the alarm over the wires.

Then he fainted away, and was found there five minutes afterward when Andy and three policemen rushed into the building.

The smoke was pouring through the place, and the fire gaining great headway.

An officer took the receiver from Bob's nerveless hand and sent the second message to the fire department.

The packing-room was a sea of flame when the fire companies reached the scene.

By energetic action the fire was confined to the basement and finally subdued.

Bob was, in the meantime, revived and told his story.

Manager Wells was aroused from his sleep, and reached the mill in time to listen to it.

"My brave boy," he said, "you certainly have saved the mill."

Once more Bob Chambers became the hero of the hour.

His desperate fight with Flanders and Sparrow, whose charred remains were found in the ruins of the packing-room on the following day, was graphically reported in next morning's News, and set the whole town talking about the boy.

A week later there was another meeting of the stockholders of the Bayport Woolen Mills, which public opin-

ion, through the Daily News, forced Duncan Pritchard to call.

At this meeting the wage question which had caused the strike was reconsidered and the action of the previous meeting reversed.

Manager Wells was ordered to dispense with the new hands and put all the old employes to work again, which he did at once, to the great satisfaction of all concerned.

Bob Chambers was called before the stockholders' meeting, complimented in warm terms for his intrepid conduct, and presented with a check from the company for \$5,000.

The insurance companies holding risks on the mill combined in testifying their appreciation of the boy's splendid efforts toward saving the mill from destruction to the extent of a check for \$1,000.

The Boston papers published the story of the affair, giving Bob full credit for courage and presence of mind, and the majority of the New England papers reprinted the same, so that for some time the name of Robert Chambers became somewhat famous through that section of the country.

Contrary to Bob's expectation, Dexter Pritchard did not go back on his word, but made good as a friend of the boy who had saved his life.

Duncan Pritchard sent for Bob, expressed the gratitude he and Mrs. Pritchard felt for what he did for the family, and tried to force his check for \$10,000 on the boy, which Bob politely but firmly refused to accept.

Then Mr. Pritchard promoted him to an excellent position in the office of the mill, with the view to his ultimately filling the office of manager.

A year later Bob became assistant to Manager Wells.

It is generally understood by the friends of both the young people that Bob and Ruby will be married next spring, when the former attains his nineteenth year.

While the strike of the Bayport Woolen Mills is a thing of the misty past, Bob always refers to it with pleasure as marking the beginning of his RISE IN LIFE.

THE END.

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